

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride**



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD19/2020)

FOR ACTION

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/Health and Social
Care Board/HSC Trusts/ NIAS

GP Medical Advisers, Health & Social Care Board
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (*for onward
distribution to practice staff*)

OOHs Medical Managers (*for onward distribution to staff*)

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

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Our Ref: HSS(MD)19/2020

Date: 28 March 2020

Dear Colleague

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) – UPDATE TO SERVICE

Action Required:

Chief Executives must ensure this information is drawn to the attention of all relevant clinical staff to enable them to respond accordingly.

The HSCB must ensure this correspondence is cascaded to all General Practitioners, Out-of-Hour Facilities, relevant Dental Services and Community Pharmacists.

The PHA must ensure this correspondence is shared with all relevant staff to enable them to respond accordingly.

We are extremely grateful for the incredible effort and hard work from all health and social care colleagues in responding to COVID-19 to date. We recognise the work that is underway to change the way that hospitals and GP practices deliver services to free up of beds and bring in more staff.

Ensuring that frontline colleagues have the highest level of protection possible is our top priority. The supply and safety of personal protective equipment (PPE) is a key priority. We want to ensure that colleagues working in any health and care setting have full confidence in the PPE they are expected to use. We hope this letter clarifies the current approach and explains our next steps.

Supply

During March 2020, more than 1m facemasks, 200,000 gloves and 40,000 aprons were delivered to Trusts, GPs and community pharmacies across Northern Ireland. Most GP practices and community pharmacies have had a supply of PPE delivered directly to their practice/premises. Emergency dental treatment is being provided in five key locations in Northern Ireland, one location within each Trust area – and PPE is being provided to dental staff at these locations.

We acknowledge that there have been some issues related to the supply of equipment and we are working hard and at pace to resolve these. We are now confident that all logistical issues are being solved and that every part of the health and care system that needs PPE will be supplied in good time with adequate stock.

Changes to the guidance

In January 2020, COVID-19 was classified in the UK as a 'high consequence infectious disease' (HCID). This was an interim recommendation in recognition of the evolving situation, and the limited data available, and it was agreed to keep the HCID status under review. Infection control guidance to protect staff from this new threat was agreed across all four UK nations. It drew on WHO guidance, and was consistent with the latest evidence from systematic reviews.

In March 2020, when more was understood about the behaviour of the virus and its clinical outcomes, the four nations agreed that COVID-19 should no longer be classified as a HCID. As a result of this and a review of the latest evidence regarding what infection control guidance was required, the guidance was updated.

Routes of transmission

The transmission of COVID-19 is through respiratory droplets generated by coughing and sneezing, and through contact with contaminated surfaces. Droplets only travel a short distance through the air.

Certain medical and patient care activities can result in the release of aerosols, these are known as Aerosol Generating Procedures (AGPs). AGPs can create a risk of airborne transmission of infections that are usually only spread by droplet transmission, therefore additional precautions must be implemented when performing AGPs on a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.

Current guidance

PPE for high-risk procedures

Recommended PPE to be used by healthcare workers delivering or assisting with an aerosol generating procedure (AGP) on patients with possible or confirmed COVID-19 including in ICU or the hot zone of an ED:

- FFP3 respirator
- Long sleeved disposable gown

- Gloves
- Eye protection (disposable goggles or full-face visor)

PPE for other settings

Recommended PPE to be used by healthcare workers within one metre of a patient with possible or confirmed COVID-19 including staff working in hospitals, primary care, ambulance trust, community care settings, care homes and domiciliary care settings:

- Fluid repellent facemask
- Apron
- Gloves
- Eye protection if there is a risk of splashing

Comparison with WHO guidelines

The UK recommends FFP3 respirators when caring for patients in areas where high risk aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) are being performed. These should be fit tested for all staff and not just fit checked. The WHO recommends FFP2 respirators for AGPs. If for any reason FFP3 masks are not available, we recommend using the FFP2 masks as a safe alternative but please note, these should also be fit-tested.

Consistent with the WHO guidelines, full sleeve gowns are recommended for high risk procedures (e.g. during AGPs) or where there is a risk of extensive splashing of blood and/or other body fluids. In all other settings, the UK has a long standing bare below the elbow policy as part of our long-term strategy to manage healthcare associated infections. Covid-19 is not airborne, it is droplet carried. Gown sleeves can become contaminated, and therefore the advice is to wear an apron, be bare below the elbows and to scrub your hands, your wrists and your forearms.

In addition to wearing PPE, clinicians should practice usual infection prevention and control measures, including environmental cleaning and hand hygiene to reduce the risk of onward transmission.

The guidance going forward

We are keeping the guidance under constant review. Over the next few days Public Health England will work with the UK administrations and partner organisations to ensure the guidance is clearer for clinical colleagues working in a variety of health and care settings performing a range of clinical procedures. They will aim to organise the recommendations using a 'place-based' approach so it is easy to understand the appropriate PPE needed for the potential risk. We will publish an update to the guidance early next week. Further resources on PPE are listed in the attached.

We are grateful for all the feedback about PPE supply and delivery. Please rest assured that all issues are being urgently dealt with.

Yours sincerely

 

Dr Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer

Professor Charlotte McArdle
Chief Nursing Officer

Encl – List of Resources

Full list of resources around PPE use

- [COVID-19 Guidance for infection prevention and control guidance](#)
- [Coronavirus guidance for clinicians](#)
- [Posters and videos on donning and doffing of PPE](#)
- [National IPC Manual including the evidence base](#)
<http://www.nipcm.scot.nhs.uk/>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874411/When_to_use_face_mask_or_FFP3.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-use-for-non-aerosol-generating-procedures>

Appendix 1 - Links to systematic reviews

Transmission Based Precautions Literature Review: Respiratory Protective Equipment

https://hspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/1722/documents/1_tbp-lr-rpe-v3.1.pdf

Aerosol Generating Procedures (AGPs) Literature review

https://hspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/2893/documents/1_tbp-lr-agp-v1.1.pdf

Transmission Based Precautions Literature Review: Definitions of Transmission Based Precautions

https://hspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/1719/documents/1_tbp-lr-definitions-v2.0.pdf

Standard Infection Control Precautions Literature Review: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Aprons/Gowns

https://hspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/2604/documents/1_sicp-lr-gowns-v2.0.pdf

Standard Infection Control Precautions Literature Review: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Surgical Face Masks

https://hspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/2609/documents/1_sicp-lr-surgical-masks-v3.1.pdf

Standard Infection Control Precautions Literature Review: Occupational exposure management (including sharps)

https://hspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/1822/documents/1_sicp-lr-sharps-v3.0.pdf

Circulation List

Director of Public Health/Medical Director, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)
Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency
Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, Health and Social Care Board (*for onward distribution to Community Pharmacies*)
Directors of Pharmacy HSC Trusts
Director of Social Care and Children, HSCB
Family Practitioner Service Leads, Health and Social Care Board (*for cascade to GP Out of Hours services*)
Medical Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Consultants, Occupational Health Physicians and School Medical Leads*)
Nursing Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Community Nurses, and Midwives*)
Directors of Children's Services, HSC Trusts
RQIA (*for onward transmission to all independent providers including independent hospitals*)
Medicines Management Pharmacists, HSC Board (*for cascade to prescribing advisers*)
Regional Medicines Information Service, Belfast HSC Trust
Regional Pharmaceutical Procurement Service, Northern HSC Trust
Professor Donna Fitzsimons, Head of School of Nursing and Midwifery QUB
Professor Sonja McIlfatrick, Head of School of Nursing, University of Ulster
Caroline Lee, CEC
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Professor Paul McCarron, Head of School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, UU
Professor Carmel Hughes, Head of School, School of Pharmacy, QUB
Professor Colin Adair, Director of the NI Centre for Pharmacy Learning and Development, QUB
Joe Brogan, Assistant Director of Integrated Care, HSCB
Michael Donaldson (*for distribution to all General Dental Practitioners*)

This letter is available on the Department of Health website at
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications>

