



Frequently Asked Questions on wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

What is PPE?

Personal Protective Equipment is what we use at work to protect ourselves (all health care workers) and our patients from coronavirus. The amount of PPE you need will depend upon where you work.

Why do we have a new guide on PPE?

We are learning more about coronavirus every day. The new guide has been produced by experts from many different areas and takes into account this new knowledge.

Does the WHO (World Health Organisation) support his guide?

The WHO has confirmed that the UK's guidance is consistent with the highest levels of protection in the world.

Does all face-to-face patient contact put me at risk of catching coronavirus and should I wear PPE all the time?

Looking after patients means that we often have to get closer than 2 metres. What PPE you need to wear will depend upon where you work. We take your safety very seriously and you will be given clear instructions on what to wear in each area.

What is an aerosol generating procedure (AGP)?

An AGP results in tiny droplets of fluid that become suspended in the air and may contain coronavirus which could then be breathed in. If you are working in an area where AGPs are performed, you will be given the right PPE to protect yourself and training to make sure you use it correctly.

If I am on a COVID-19 ward but am not in direct contact with patients, do I need to wear PPE?

Yes, if you are on a COVID-19 ward more than 2 metres from a patient then you should wear a face mask and assess the need for eye protection.

If you are within 2 metres of a patient on a COVID-19 ward, you should use disposable gloves, a disposable apron and fluid-resistant surgical mask, with eye protection. If an AGP is to be performed you will need more protection and these procedures will not be performed until all staff in the area are safe. You will need to wear gloves, gown, an FFP3 mask (or FFP2) and eye protection.

Can the virus land and stay on my hair? Do I need to wear a cap to cover my hair as well as recommended PPE?

The virus does not land and stay on hair for any length of time. Surgical hats or other headwear is not required for clinical staff apart from areas where they are normally worn such as operating theatres.



What should I do with my shoes?

You should wear the right shoes for the area where you work and your trust will have a dress code you should follow.

Should I shower when I get home?

There is no requirement to routinely shower after you finish work. However, do ensure you follow recommended hand hygiene measures at work, when you are out and about, and when you are at home.

Should I remove my uniform or workwear before going home?

It is best practice to change into your uniform when you arrive at work and out of it before you leave. You shouldn't wear your uniform when travelling. If you wear your own clothes, then you should change when you get home.

This does not apply to community health workers who are required to travel between patients in the same uniform.

Wash uniforms and clothing worn at work at the hottest temperature suitable for the fabric. A wash for 10 minutes at 60°C removes almost all micro-organisms. Washing with detergent at lower temperatures – down to 30°C – eliminates MRSA and most other micro-organisms, including coronaviruses.

Should clinicians wear scrubs in all clinical areas with patient contact?

There is no requirement to wear scrubs, but you will be given local guidance on this. Organisations may consider the use of theatre scrubs for staff who do not usually wear a uniform but who are likely to come into close contact with patients e.g. medical staff.

Should staff assisting with AGPs wear PPE as well as staff carrying out the AGP?

Yes. AGPs should only be performed when all staff in the area are safe and wearing the correct PPE.

In an emergency do I need to put on PPE if it costs valuable time?

If you are working in an area where emergency care is given, your department will ensure that you are wearing the right PPE. Sudden procedures, such as chest compressions for cardiac arrest can be started without PPE. However, if an emergency AGP is needed, this will be delayed until staff in the area are safely protected in the appropriate PPE.

What is the difference between standard surgical mask and FFP2/3?

A standard surgical mask will protect you and your patient from virus that may be present in spittle. You will be clearly told where and when you should wear this mask and also when patients should wear one.

A FFP mask has a filter that removes particles and must be used in certain areas where there is a risk of particles in the air carrying coronavirus usually where an AGP is taking place. The areas and times when these masks are needed will be made clear by your trust.

You should make sure your FFP mask fits properly. If you have any doubts, ask!

Can you re-use PPE?

You should change gloves and aprons between each patient and wash your hands. However, you can wear gowns, respirators and eye protection for an entire session (eg ward round or GP session), depending on the area where you work. This will be made clear to you by your organisation.

Some of the PPE I have is out of date, is it safe?

Yes, these have a much longer shelf-life than the date marked and all PPE has passed stringent tests. Any supply that is not up to standard is destroyed.

