

The use and supply of PPE in primary care

Member briefing

Introduction

There have been very strong concerns among our members and the wider health sector that appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is not reaching primary care teams in the quantity needed and in a timely fashion, leaving many clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), primary care networks (PCNs) and GP practices feeling unable to safely carry out face-to-face consultations with patients.

The House of Commons was told last week that more than 7.5million pieces of PPE had been shipped for distribution, but there is a lack of clarity on how CCGs and PCNs should procure or access them and get them to frontline professionals.

Today's [guidance](#) (2 April 2020) from the Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health Wales, Public Health Agency Northern Ireland, Health Protection Scotland, Public Health England and NHS England and NHS Improvement clarifies the type of PPE required for different circumstances. This guidance will be kept under review. Through NHS Clinical Commissioners and the NHS Confederation's PCN Network, we have fed our members' concerns into this process, while recognising that there are still concerns about the supply and distribution of PPE.

The guidance is being sent to all healthcare organisations at the same time, including CCGs and individual practices. CCGs will no doubt want to support their practices and PCNs in being able to use the guidance and secure appropriate supplies.

The key changes to PPE guidance are:

- enhanced PPE recommendations for a wide range of health and social care contexts
- inclusion of individual and organisational risk assessment at local level to inform PPE use

- recommendation of single sessional (extended) use of some PPE items
- re-usable PPE can be used – advice on suitable decontamination arrangements should be obtained from the manufacturer, supplier or local infection control
- guidance for when case status is unknown, and SARS-CoV-2 is circulating at high levels
- recommendation on patient use of face masks.

Summary for primary care

- Plastic aprons, fluid-resistant surgical masks (FRSMs), eye protection and gloves should be used for any direct care of possible and confirmed cases. Such PPE may be indicated for work in such settings regardless of case status, subject to local risk assessment.
- For health and social care workers working in reception and communal areas but not involved in direct patient care, every effort should be made to maintain social distancing of two metres. Where this is not practical, use of FRSM is recommended.
- For provision of direct care to any member of a household where one or more is a possible or confirmed case, plastic aprons, FRSMs, eye protection and gloves are recommended.
- For delivery of care to any individual meeting criteria for shielding (vulnerable groups) or where anyone in the household meets criteria for shielding, as a minimum, single use disposable plastic aprons, surgical mask and gloves must be worn for the protection of the patient. If the individual is encountered in any context described, or if they meet the case definition, then additional PPE should be applied as above.
- The principles described in this guidance apply to all health and social care settings.

PPE guidance is provided for [primary and community care](#) and [any setting](#).

We would recommend that you also ensure staff know how to use PPE, to gain maximum protection, including advice on how to take it on and off. Public Health England has produced some [useful videos](#). Compliance with standard infection control precautions and transmissions-based precautions is also essential.

Supply chain

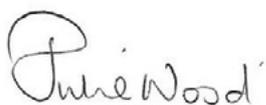
The demand for PPE is now tens of thousands of times higher than usual and this is impacting the supply chain. NHS England and NHS Improvement is working hard to respond to demand and is confident there is sufficient supply to support this new guidance.

A new parallel supply chain for PPE has been developed set up by NHS Supply Chain, the Ministry of Defence, Unipart Logistics and supported by Clipper Logistics, who will be delivering the service.

Primary care supply chain

- We know that generally, practices that do not use the NHS supply chain have experienced difficulties and a new e-commerce solution will be put in place for the week commencing 6 April.
- This solution will have easy 'Amazon-style' registration and ordering processes that can cope with high demand. Products ordered will be delivered by Royal Mail.

We hope that colleagues in primary care, whether CCGs or PCNs, have found this useful. Please continue to give us your feedback by emailing us on press@nhsc.org or PCNnetwork@nhsconfed.org



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