



Give proper PPE to health & social care workers or thousands more will die

12 Jan 2021

They are putting their lives at risk to try and save ours – the least we can do is protect theirs

GMB has written to the Health Secretary to demand all NHS and social care workers are given access to full PPE to prevent more unnecessary deaths.

In the letter to Matt Hancock, the union says in order to save lives, workers must be provided with full coverage of skin, hair and clothing, including head covers; goggles; FFP3 masks; coveralls or long-sleeved gowns; shoe coverings; medical grade gloves.

By Email

12th January 2021

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health & Social Care
Department of Health & Social Care
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS



Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for all Health and Social Care Staff

I am contacting you again with concerns that GMB Union and our members have about the current guidance for the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in health and social care during the Coronavirus Pandemic (Covid-19). I have written to you previously to raise issues regarding PPE on 29th March, 2nd August and 14th December 2020. A copy of the most recent letter is attached below.

Throughout the Pandemic there have been severe shortcomings within health and social care in terms of workers health and safety. Workplaces have been full of hazards and psychological risks and workers have been left to make do with lower level and low quality PPE, go with without sufficient rest periods and breaks and take on extra workloads and hours - often to the detriment of their own health, safety and well-being.

GMB has consistently called on Government and Public Health England to work with us to review the PPE guidance to ensure those working in health and social care are sufficiently protected. It is therefore deeply concerning to see the increasing numbers of health and social care workers contracting Covid-19. There can be no doubt that health and social care workers are at a greater risk than ever now due to the new variant of the virus which is transmitting at a higher rate.

It is the Government's responsibility now to do everything in its power to protect these key workers. According to SAGE, mitigations to reduce transmission include:

- Where interactions between people are unavoidable, then engineering, procedural and personal controls are essential for reducing transmission. It is important that these measures are applied rigorously to ensure they are effective (high confidence). Organisations and individuals should reassess their environments in the light of new evidence about transmissibility of the new variant to consider whether they have maximised all the steps they can take to reduce the probability of transmission.
- Face coverings and face masks control the source of the virus and provide important mitigation against all routes of transmission. They also provide a degree of protection against exposure...The effectiveness of face coverings improves with quality of design (multilayer masks are better than single layer), a snugger fit on the face, and correct usage with both nose and mouth covered (high confidence). A better level of mitigation could be achieved through specifying higher performance face coverings and masks, and this should particularly be considered in settings where people are

According to the ONS, 618 health and social care workers' deaths in England and Wales were linked to covid-19 up to 30 June 2020 (the latest date for which figures are available).

This is the second time the union has written to the Health Secretary making this demand on behalf of members.

Since the start of the pandemic, GMB has consistently raised concerns about the lack of adequate PPE for health and social workers.

“ Health and social care workers are putting their lives at risk to try and save ours – the least we can do is make sure they are properly protected while they do it.

Rachel Harrison, GMB National Officer

Despite being assured by Ministers there are sufficient levels of PPE, terrified members report working on the front line with inadequate protection.

In November, ambulance workers blamed 'second rate' PPE for thousands of covid-related absences.

Meanwhile in April a hospital worker faced the sack for raising concerns about the lack of PPE.

“ Staff morale in the NHS is at an all-time low due to a decade of Tory cuts.

The Government needs to move heaven and earth to



“ support these worker so that the service doesn’t collapse as workers look for a lifeboat to exit in.
#NHSPay15 <https://t.co/470sH4qNms>

— **GMB Union (@GMB_union)** January 11, 2021

Rachel Harrison, GMB National Officer, said:

“Our health and social care services are on the point of collapse due to covid-related absence and Immense pressure on the already creaking system.

“They are putting their lives at risk to try and save ours – the least we can do is make sure they are properly protected while they do it.

“Ministers must step in and make sure our health and social care workers have what they need to keep us safe, or thousands of people will die unnecessarily.”

