



21 January 2021

By email: rachel.harrison@gmb.org.uk

Dear Ms Harrison,

Re: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Thank you for your letter dated 14th December 2020 regarding the guidance for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) on behalf of the GMB Union and your members. I am aware that you have also written to the Department of Health & Social Care on the same topic.

We understand your concerns for the health and safety of your members and can I assure you that I, and all of us at Public Health England, equally hold the health and safety of the public as our highest priority.

Before I address the points raised please allow me to clarify one critical point; PHE do not lead the PPE guidance process. The guidance is managed through a UK-wide consultation via the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) cell which is led by NHS England and Improvement (NHSE/I). PHE is a member of the cell and provides expertise and advice and while we welcome opportunities for collaboration with the GMB and trade unions more generally, it is critical to note the capacity in which we act.

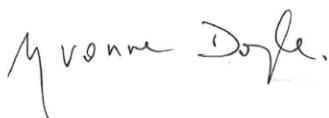
With that clarification, in response to the comments you have raised;

- I agree that the role of airborne transmission of COVID-19 is now better understood than at any time since the start of the pandemic. The IPC cell very recently reviewed this evidence in relation to PPE and concluded that at present there is no new evidence to require altered PPE levels.
- The need for increasing ventilation is well recognised and reflected in the latest IPC guidance; again, this is an area where the IPC cell continues to review the evidence. NHS estates may be better placed to offer insights into the practical implications of the evidence and guidance.

- On your point regarding asymptomatic staff testing positive for COVID-19, PHE does not hold data on this so cannot comment on the issue directly. Could I suggest the NHS, the SAGE Subgroup: The Hospital Onset Committee (HOCl Group) and NHS T&T may be better placed to comment on the true extent. It is important to note however that firstly transmission can occur in the community as well as healthcare settings and secondly that PPE is only one facet of risk mitigation and all individuals should be encouraged to take as many risk reducing actions as practicable and permitted within their role.
- On Aerosol Generating Procedures (AGPs), the Government has set up an Independent AGP review panel which has been commissioned to review the evidence base around high-risk AGPs in relation to COVID-19. The systematic review and recommendations have now been published and are available online by following the below link:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-high-risk-agp-panel-summary-of-recommendations/independent-high-risk-agp-panel-summary-of-recommendations-arising-from-evidence-reviews-to-date>
- On surgical masks, the IPC cell has, in light of the new variant, reviewed the evidence and concluded that no change in current recommendations are required. Again it is important to highlight that PPE makes up only one aspect of personal risk reduction and adherence to all IPC measures is critical for reducing an individual's personal risk of COVID contraction.

Finally, can I offer my heartfelt thanks and appreciation for all the work your members are doing on the frontline of health and social care; their commitment to their profession is commendable and deserves recognition, so thank you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Yvonne Doyle".

Yvonne Doyle CB MD

Medical Director and Director for Health Protection