

17<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Yvonne Doyle CB MD  
Medical Director & Director of Health Protection  
Public Health England

By email: [Yvonne.doyle@phe.gov.uk](mailto:Yvonne.doyle@phe.gov.uk)



Dear Yvonne,

**Re: The use of FFP3 Face Masks**

I am contacting you with concerns that GMB and our members have about the use of FFP3 face masks.

- **Out of Date**

GMB has been raising concerns across the country over the supplies of out of date Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and insistence by Government and employers that these are safe to use.

GMB believes that 3M masks have a 5-year shelf life as stated in the paperwork within boxes of supplies. On this basis, GMB has contacted 3M Medical Solutions direct with regards two separate cases of which I have briefly outlined details for you below. However, please note, we are aware that there are similar issues with regards out of date stock in many other areas across the country.

On the first occasion, GMB Representatives contacted 3M to enquire about the expiry dates printed on boxes of masks, after a disagreement with a local employer about what the date was. The response received on 20<sup>th</sup> May stated that the dates on the boxes of 3M surgical masks is the expiry date of the product. 3M recommends that the product should not be used beyond this date as the quality of the product cannot be guaranteed. 3M does not offer a re-testing service for a new date to be applied beyond the original expiry date. They state the product should not be used beyond this date.

After further enquiries were made, 3M responded again on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May to inform GMB that the NHS FFP3 Pandemic stock is Government property and the issuance of that stock is the sole responsibility of Public Health England (PHE). They also informed us that 3M previously revalidated the stock beyond its expiry date, but did not conduct the recent testing to allow the distribution and subsequent use of the respirators.

On the second occasion, GMB Representatives contacted 3M to enquire about specific masks that had been supplied, again with out of date expiry dates on and to enquire about whether the masks had been re-tested and declared safe to use.

3M responded on the 4<sup>th</sup> May to inform GMB that one of the batches referred to in our communication (3M 8833) had been granted two extensions. All were relabelled with new expiry dates. They advised that if the boxes did not have new labels then they should not be used.

GMB responded with further enquiries as some of the boxes had three stickers over the expiry dates - 1/6/12; 20/10/14; and 30/6/16. Effectively therefore, they were all still out of date despite the re-labelling.

3M responded on the 5<sup>th</sup> May to inform GMB that the NHS originally purchased these supplies for SARS, 17 years ago. 3M were asked to extend the life of the product. The extension was granted, a sample of the products were re-tested and supplies were re-labelled with new expiry dates. A further extension was granted after further re-testing and re-labelling. They went on to state: "However, the product will naturally degrade with time and we are unable to extend the life any further. If the final expiry date has passed, the product should not be used."

PHE and Government continue to state that all PPE supplies are rigorously tested and safe to use. However, GMB continues to have doubts about the accuracy of this statement.

The GMB is seeking clarification on:

1. Who is responsible for the rigorous testing of supplies?
2. How are these tested?
3. Is every box tested or just a random selection?
4. What has been your advice to employers regarding the use of out of date stock?

- **Masks with valves**

I would also like to bring to your attention the recent statement made by The British Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons regarding masks with valves and their advice to immediately stop using them. Their statement can be accessed at:

[https://www.baoms.org.uk/\\_userfiles/pages/files/professionals/covid\\_19/baoms\\_baos\\_ppe\\_a\\_void\\_using\\_ffp3\\_masks\\_with\\_valves\\_for\\_close\\_patient\\_interactions\\_may\\_2020\\_updated.pdf](https://www.baoms.org.uk/_userfiles/pages/files/professionals/covid_19/baoms_baos_ppe_a_void_using_ffp3_masks_with_valves_for_close_patient_interactions_may_2020_updated.pdf)

The advice is that masks with valves should be avoided in order to reduce the risks to patients if staff are unknowingly Covid-19 positive.

GMB is seeking clarification on:

5. What is PHE position on this statement?
6. What advice has been issued to employers regarding this advice?

GMB believes that all potentially exposed staff should have the highest form of protection available and need to understand PHE position on the above raised issues.

I await your response to this so that we can reassure our members that their health, safety and wellbeing is of the utmost of importance to yourselves, their employers and the Government.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Harrison', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rachel Harrison  
GMB National Officer - Health & Social Care  
[Rachel.harrison@gmb.org.uk](mailto:Rachel.harrison@gmb.org.uk)