

Important Update: Surgical masks

As mentioned in yesterday's bulletin, new national guidance requires all staff in a healthcare setting to wear a surgical mask from Monday 15th June. Guidance has been provided by the Infection Prevention and Control Team and can be [found here](#).

Masks serve two purposes

a) to prevent an asymptomatic staff member inadvertently transmitting the virus to a patient or colleague.

b) to prevent acquisition of infected droplets from a patient (or colleague) who may have COVID-19.

As long as you can strictly maintain at least 2m social distancing and this is not compromised, you are not required to wear a mask.

We recognise that people outside clinical areas are not used to wearing masks during the working day and this may feel uncomfortable. Below are some of the questions which may reassure you that the purpose is for the safety of yourselves and others.

Why?

1. Why do we have to wear masks now when we have been working as we are since the beginning of Covid?

The transmission of COVID-19 is thought to occur mainly through respiratory droplets or aerosols generated by coughing and sneezing, and through contact with contaminated surfaces.

- There is some evidence that the use of surgical face masks can reduce the transmission of COVID-19. Evidence of reducing transmission from infected individuals is stronger than the evidence for face masks preventing the wearer from becoming infected. Staff should not be at work if they are symptomatic, so this guidance aims to reduce risks of transmission from people who are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic for COVID-19.
- Recent point prevalence data from surveillance studies of NHS HCWs in hospitals and ONS data suggest that the rate of COVID-19 positivity is around 10-20 times higher than in the general population at present.
- The WHO suggests that the extended use of facemasks should be considered when the risk of exposure to COVID-19 is higher due to local outbreaks/clusters of infection, or for those working in close contact with the public, or in confined or busy spaces such as public transport.

General guidance

- 2. The government talks about wearing a mask unless you are in a COVID safe area. What is the definition of a COVID safe administration area?**

We don't have any COVID safe administration areas so we expect all staff to wear masks.

- 3. If masks run out do staff have to work at home?**

The supply is closely monitored by Incident Co-ordination Centre (ICC) to ensure that supplies don't run out. Any supplies shortages and resulting actions will be managed through ICC and communicated through daily Bronze and Silver Command.

- 4. How do you stop glasses from steaming up while wearing a mask? What if I wear a headscarf?**

You will need to ensure that the mask is fitted properly and that your glasses are sitting correctly.

If you wear a headscarf and are unable to wrap the loops around your ears inside the headscarf there are wrap arounds which allow the elastic to be wrapped around the back of the head. These can be obtained from the IPC team. [Click here](#) for PPE guidelines.

Ordering and obtaining masks

- 5. How do I order facemasks for my team?**

Each Department has provided details for the delivery of masks and an individual has been identified to co-ordinate the distribution and will be communicating with staff.

- 6. Where do the nursery staff stand in regards to face masks and will there be an adequate supply to these departments as well as in the hospitals?**

Staff will be required to wear masks and these will be supplied as with all other non-clinical areas.

- 7. Currently the LTHT nurseries are operating without the wearing of masks either for staff or children as they are following the Ofsted guidance. I feel that the nurseries are Covid secure and we have taken many steps to make changes to increase the safety of our staff & children.**

Staff in LTHT nurseries will be required to wear masks.

- 8. Who is responsible for providing surgical masks for bank and agency staff?**

The line manager of bank/agency staff is responsible for providing PPE.

Non-clinical, admin and office based staff

9. Do staff in non-clinical areas (eg Trust HQ) have to wear a face mask?

Where you are unable to maintain the 2 metre social distancing rule you will need to wear a mask.

10. I am a secretary – do I have to wear a mask all day while I work or just when I go outside of the office?

If you're alone in your own office you do not need to wear a mask. If someone comes into the office and you cannot maintain the 2M distance you will need to wear a mask. When you go out of your office and cannot maintain 2M social distance you need to wear a mask.

Outside the office, corridors, open areas you do need to wear a mask because many of LTHT corridors etc are not 2 metres wide and there will be an increase in people traffic.

In regards to restrooms in clinical areas, CSU have been asked to risk assess the size of these size to determine how many people they could accommodate applying the 2m+ rule. This may mean staff going to breaks in cohorts, extending the lunch break period to enable staff to adhere to 2m distance. If they cannot accommodate 2m+ then wear a mask.

You will also be required to wear a mask if you travel on the shuttle bus as the 2 metre social distance is unable to be met.

11. Are non-clinical workers going to be forced to wear masks even if it causes anxiety issues?

It is in the interests of all staff and patients (including yourself) that you wear a mask.

Recent point prevalence data from surveillance studies of NHS HCWs in hospitals and ONS data suggest that the rate of COVID-19 positivity is around 10-20 times higher than in the general population at present.

If you have any concerns about this you need to speak to your line manager in the first instance. If you still feel uncomfortable contact Occupational Health.

12. Can the drivers of any of our other Trust vehicles, cars, 3.5T, 18T vehicles, will they have to wear masks as they do not have anyone else in their vehicles because of social distancing.

If you are driving alone you do not need to wear a mask.

13. Do the bus drivers have to wear masks as they are behind a screen?

A risk assessment should be carried out to ensure that the screen provides adequate protection as the 2 metre social distancing cannot be complied with on the shuttle.

Travel to and from work

14. Do I need to wear a surgical face mask when travelling to and from work?

No, but you do need to wear a face covering as per the national guidelines applicable to all members of the public.

Once you are on hospital premises we would expect you to be wearing a surgical mask inside, or outside if you are unable to socially distance.

15. How do I have a clean mask in the morning and what do I do with my used mask at the end of the day

You will need to take a clean mask home in a bag for use the next day.

When taking off your used mask you must decontaminate hands and dispose of in the correct waste stream as per point 25. These will be in place for Monday 15th June.

16. Will there be a supply of surgical masks for staff on entry to the buildings or will staff be allowed to walk to their own departments unmasked to collect them?

You will be provided with masks and will be expected to wear them when moving around the Trust. You will need to put on a mask on entrance to the building before you get to your department.

17. Do you put your mask on as you leave the car park, enter the hospital or arrive at your ward or office?

See above

Clinical staff

18. I do an outpatient clinic with a mixture of telephone and face to face assessments. I think that my mask would interfere with telephone calls (the microphone of the headset would rub on the mask, plus my voice would be muffled), so I would need to remove my mask before making a call. Should I then use a fresh mask (as staff are instructed to do after eating, for example), or reuse the one I had on earlier?

You will get used to wearing a mask. You will be able to wear them during telephone calls, sound will not be muffled. It's all new to many people - you may need a different headset or microphone.

19. Is it safe to be sat in a closed falls bay for the full length of your shift wearing the same mask?

In a falls bay you would be expected to wear the appropriate PPE in line with the clinical area.

Eating and drinking

20. We do not have rest room facilities and will eat and drink in our office, is that still ok?

Yes however, you need to be 2m distanced when eating if anyone else is in the office with you. We ask that you minimize the number of times you put on and take off your mask.

If you are eating and drinking in company, you need to ensure 2m social distancing otherwise you will need to wear a mask.

Putting on and taking off masks increases the risk of virus transmission into the air therefore, you will need to try to organise your day in order to limit the number of times you are going to local areas i.e. kitchen areas etc. You will need to consider how you can reduce going into communal areas where there is a need for masks. Organise yourselves in a way which means you are not just wearing a mask to collect food more frequently than you need to.

Clinical example - staff put on a mask and leave on for whole period, up to their next scheduled break therefore, non-clinical staff will need to think about how they have fewer, more structured breaks which limits the number of times you are removing your mask.

21. Do I need to change my mask even if I am just going on a short distance trip i.e. using the toilet?

In non-clinical areas the mask can be folded in on itself and provided you ensure that you decontaminate your hands afterwards you can use the same mask.

22. How do we remain hydrated during our working day - can we remove the mask to drink? And as stated, we are to wear them during breaks outside what is the process for been able to eat at drink during our breaks?

You will need to remove your mask to eat and drink. If you are able to maintain the 2 metre distance between yourself and colleagues outside you will not be required to wear your mask.

If you are wearing a mask in non-clinical areas the mask can be folded in on itself and provided you ensure that you decontaminate your hands afterwards you can use the same mask.

Reasonable adjustments

The following questions have been captured and we are trying to get confirmed answers from the appropriate professionals. However, in the interim, it would be helpful to consider whether individuals can work from home

- 23. I wear hearing aids on both sides and when doing a weekend shift doing ward deliveries I had to put a fresh mask on in each ward. I found this to constantly get tangled up in the loops of the mask.**

I am concerned that this results in me touching my face far more often and touching the hearing aids frequently to reposition them and then put them back in my ear.

- 24. How will I manage to function as a deaf member of staff who relies on lip-reading? I believe a reasonable adjustment would be for the Trust to supply face masks with transparent component.**

The priority would be to try to socially distance to avoid the need for the use of a mask if you are communicating with a person who is hard of hearing or deaf. That way the person can still lip read and conversation can still be had without masks.

The masks with a transparent component are not currently available to meet the specifications but these are being worked on.

Disposal

- 25. Which bin do the surgical face masks go in? Clinical waste or domestic waste?**

- In Clinical areas with COVID19 positive patients:
As now, dispose of the face mask in Infectious (Orange bags.)
- In Clinical areas with non-COVID19 patients:
Face masks should be disposed of in the Offensive waste (Yellow and black or "Tiger" bags.)
- Public entrances and exits:
Face masks should be disposed of in the Offensive waste (Yellow & black or "Tiger" bags). Additional bins will be provided.
- Non-COVID19 staff areas and other communal areas (e.g. Admin):
Face masks can be disposed of in the domestic waste stream (Black bags.)

