

BRIEFING

#ProtectNHSworkers

Briefing on dangerous shortages and expired, warped, and broken PPE

About EveryDoctor

We are a not-for-profit membership organisation of 1000 UK doctors and we receive daily feedback from the frontline via the 25,000 doctors in our private forum. Our organisation advocates for the safety and well-being of every doctor, NHS worker and patient.

Every week we will bring you information you cannot access anywhere else; we are fed sensitive information from our nationwide network of UK doctors and will share this with you privately.

Overview

- **195 health and social care workers have now died** as a result of exposure to coronavirus. We now know some of these workers **did not have any personal protective equipment (PPE)** during their shifts.^{1 2}
- **NHS England is not following WHO standards for PPE;** our PPE guidelines are substandard, and there has been no explanation given (no clear evidence base for this decision-making). EveryDoctor, along with various politicians, have been seeking answers since the beginning of the coronavirus crisis. We have received no reassuring information at all from NHS England or Public Health England regarding their rejection of WHO guidance.
- In the past week, reports of damaged, expired and inadequate PPE have been emerging from our network of 25,000 UK doctors. These testimonials are also backed up by EveryDoctor's reporting tool which shows dangerous shortages in PPE. We are following a sample of 650 UK doctors throughout the crisis. After yesterday's survey, **40% of doctors** report that they don't have the protection they need to keep themselves and their patients safe. This includes **26% of medics** working in areas with "aerosol generating procedures". These medics are exposed to a **high viral load**, which significantly increases their risk of contracting the virus and passing it onto others.
- We're calling for MPs to **sign our statement to the Prime Minister**, urging him to mandate the consideration of local provision of PPE in coroners' inquests into COVID-19 related healthcare worker deaths. If we can record these facts at the time of healthcare workers' deaths, this information can be examined in detail during subsequent public inquiries.
- **If politicians fail to act immediately, even more healthcare workers will die. We are in the midst of a humanitarian crisis.**

What is the problem?

- **The UK has now overtaken Italy as the country with the highest numbers of deaths from coronavirus in Europe.** The death toll of healthcare workers has grown due to the high viral load they healthcare staff are exposed to in their daily work — but also due to inadequate PPE.
- In order to protect the public, **we need to protect NHS staff adequately. 190 health and social care workers have died so far.**
- A **lack of adequate PPE** and support means many more healthcare workers could become gravely or fatally ill as they endure extremely challenging conditions at work.
- Three months into this crisis, EveryDoctor's **reporting tool** has identified critical gaps in PPE and testing and the results are alarming. Yesterday, 40% of doctors we surveyed reported not having adequate PPE and 50% of doctors in community settings are still not able to access coronavirus testing for themselves and colleagues.³
- GPs, junior doctors and temporary doctors are particularly affected. 58% of GPs reported inadequate PPE, as did 50% of foundation year doctors at the very start of their training, with this rising to 40% for locally employed staff (usually on short-term contracts with NHS trusts or CCGs).

How has this happened?

- The World Health Organisation's standards for personal protection equipment (PPE) when assessing suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases are very clear: Mask, gloves, goggles, gown. This applies to every single healthcare worker.
- The UK Government's guidance on PPE changed multiple times in the early weeks of the crisis. This caused chaos and confusion. The original guidance did not stipulate the requirement for any eye protection for most healthcare workers. After persistent campaigning by EveryDoctor and others, eye protection was included in the guidance. However long-sleeved gowns have never been supplied for the majority of NHS workers. Instead, plastic aprons are provided, which are flimsy and provide poor coverage.
- At this juncture in the pandemic, any NHS patient experiencing fatigue, coryzal symptoms, myalgia, sore throat, diarrhoea, nausea, shortness of breath, fever and or dry cough should be considered a suspected COVID-19 case until proven otherwise.
- We have been saying since the beginning of this crisis: "to survive this crisis, all NHS staff including paramedics, porters, cleaners and caterers should have ready access to adequate PPE in line with WHO standards." 190 of our colleagues have died already. How many more need to die before the guidance is changed?

Why are doctors concerned?

There is now a two- fold problem; inadequate guidance, and inadequate supply (even of this substandard PPE).

- Anecdotally, we have heard reports from our network of 25,000 doctors of NHS Trusts going against the NHS England guidance; downgrading local PPE policies because of a lack of supply, using expired, damaged and mouldy PPE. In some cases, doctors are being instructed to carry out “aerosol generating procedures” on suspected COVID-19 cases with just an apron and no long-sleeved gown.⁴

CASE STUDY 1.

Healthcare workers have used PPE which passed quality assurance tests, but subsequently was withdrawn as it was found to be unsafe.

EveryDoctor has received evidence from a teaching hospital, which has been recalling FFP2 respirator masks which were being used. This calls into question the quality assurance mechanisms these masks underwent before being supplied to the NHS.

The Trust was informed of a recall of some FFP2 masks late yesterday evening, by NHS England.

“We need to ensure all of these particular type of mask are removed from clinical use. The masks are of the correct filtering safety standard but concerns around quality and suitability for use have been raised nationally.”

We need all areas to undertake the following actions:

- All areas to check for stocks of this mask (FFP2 with elastic ear loops and the **code 1282** on the box)
- Any stock found should be reported to the incident command on ext 64032 or 64034, or [email to covid19internaluse@nuh.nhs.uk](mailto:covid19internaluse@nuh.nhs.uk) - collection will be arranged
- All areas need to report any shortfalls in FFP2 as a result, ideally before 2PM to the PPE emergency stores

Thank you for your cooperation.

CASE STUDY 2.

EveryDoctor received an account of insufficient PPE from an obstetrician whose hospital was without sterile gowns for most of their shift. This situation placed both healthcare workers and patients at risk.

“Yesterday my hospital ran out of gowns. We had to use a pinny for intubation on a baby as we didn’t have any gowns available...the lack of gowns meant that for most of my shift (a shipment came later in the afternoon) we didn’t have sterile gowns to do procedures. If a baby had been born prematurely we wouldn’t have had sterile gowns to put umbilical lines in!”

CASE STUDY 3.

A doctor wears ill-fitting PPE in an Intensive Care Unit in London. This doctor should be wearing a long-sleeved gown, by both UK and WHO guidelines. This is not a gown, and is incorrectly sized. This doctor regularly carries out AGPs.

**CASE STUDY 4.**

An EveryDoctor member reports the PPE situation at their workplace. As a member of staff working in an area with AGPs, they should have been provided with respirator mask, goggles, long-sleeved gown, gloves, and a plastic apron.

“I started at the hospital 4 weeks ago working in Covid ITU. 2 weeks later the first item of PPE to go were the disposable gowns. We were originally told to tape 2 pairs of gloves to the gowns to prevent contamination of the skin but the tape has been clogging the washing machines so we were told to no longer provide tape.

At my hospital we have two types of FFP3 masks, one that fits the majority and another that fits those with a smaller face. The latter have now run out and we have been told that if you fit one you fit both which is not true and really quite dangerous. We do not know when we will get new masks and people are still working on the wards with ill-fitting PPE.”

CASE STUDY 5.

GP practices have been supplied with expired face masks that have concealed 'best before' stickers. This example shows masks which are 12 years old. We have heard reports of masks which are up to 15 years old. Many of the older masks have perished straps, or straps which loosen; which eliminates the seal protecting workers by attaching the mask to their skin.



What should happen next?

- During this national crisis, EveryDoctor is calling on all parliamentarians to do everything in their power to guarantee adequate protection and support for every NHS worker.
- In particular, we are calling on our pledge takers to co-sign a letter to the Prime Minister urging all coronial inquests into COVID-19 related healthcare worker deaths to consider the local provision of PPE. The deadline to add your signature is COB Thursday, so we can provide this to the press at the weekend.
- We are also calling on our leaders to #ProtectNHSworkers by pledging to give them the support and protection they need to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. 92 MPs have so far signed up to our 5-point pledge. (see next page)

Politicians who commit to the pledge are publicly named on our website: protectnhsworkers.org.uk

Take the Pledge to #ProtectNHSWorkers and ensure:

1. **Readily available testing** - to ensure no NHS worker is unduly removed from the workplace and into self-isolation at this crucial time.
 2. **Adequate PPE** which means a mask, goggles, gown and gloves throughout every shift for every NHS worker in line with WHO standards.
 3. **Death-in-service benefits** with NHS workers' families compensated for their service like the armed forces, should they die from coronavirus.
 4. **Equal sick pay rights** so "locum" healthcare workers aren't left in financial difficulty if they contract coronavirus while caring for others.
 5. **Hospital accommodation** so NHS workers can safely self-isolate to protect vulnerable people in their household if they become sick.
- You can show your support on social media by using **#ProtectNHSWorkers** and **@EveryDoctorUK**.

Sources

- ¹ Sky News, Coronavirus: NHS nurse who died 'would still be alive if given proper protective equipment', 2 April 2020.
- ² BBC, Coronavirus: Anger over lack of PPE for nurse Gareth Roberts, 14 April 2020.
- ³ EveryDoctor, Reporting Tool, April 2020.
- ⁴ EveryDoctor, The Political Mess forum, March, April 2020

For more information

For more information, or to find out how you can raise awareness in Parliament or with your constituents contact Dr Julia Patterson, EveryDoctor Lead on julia@everydoctor.org.uk