**PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM COVID-19 AT WORK – surgical masks in non-clinical areas – an update**

Throughout the pandemic, we have used the latest evidence and national guidance to inform our decisions around safe working and infection prevention and control.

The safety of our colleagues and patients remains our top priority. As the weather warms up and respiratory viruses become less common, we continue to take a risk-based approach to safety measures.

With that in mind, our Clinical Advisory Group (CAG) has re-looked at the evidence and risks surrounding mask wearing in non-clinical areas. We can now further update our mask guidance based on their advice:

* All colleagues in clinical areas, including corridors, must continue to wear a fluid repellent surgical face mask (FRSM) at all times
* Colleagues in non-clinical areas, no longer have to wear a mask if
  + They are sitting at a desk at least 1m from others
  + They are in a meeting with others where social distancing can be maintained
* Colleagues in non-clinical areas should continue to wear a mask whenever:
  + They are walking around
  + They are in a meeting with other people and unable to maintain social distancing
  + If they have respiratory symptoms and a negative LFT test
* Colleagues in non-clinical areas should also consider
  + Whether they might have had recent, direct contact with someone who later tested positive for Covid
  + Whether they can improve ventilation in their work area
  + Whether any colleagues working nearby may be clinically vulnerable and benefit from continued mask wearing in the area.

All colleagues should continue to undertake twice weekly lateral flow tests - ordered via the Gov UK website [Order coronavirus (COVID-19) rapid lateral flow tests - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests).

All colleagues are also advised to have their COVID-19 vaccination and booster dose(s).

Staff who are unable to tolerate a mask require a medical exemption note from their GP. These staff will require assessment by Occupational Health and safe ways of working will be assessed by the Trusts Risk Assessment Advisory Panel (RAAP). Face visors replacing surgical masks will only be allowed in low risk circumstances advised by the RAAP.

COVID secure and risk assessment for the work environment are available on online system via [SHE Evotix](https://uk.sheassure.net/WSHFT) for managers. The risk assessment can be access without a login by using this [Link](https://app.uk.sheassure.net/WSHFT/p/portal).

ENDS

**Additional content for the intranet**

**Do’s and don’ts for wearing a mask – always make sure**

• Your mask covers your nose, mouth and chin completely

• Your mask is fitted securely around your nose

• Your mask does not have any rips or tears

• You do not touch the front of your mask once it is on

• You do not pull you mask down around your neck when it is not in use

Disposing of used masks

Masks worn in clinical and public areas should be disposed of in the appropriate clinical waste bins. For masks worn in non-clinical areas, domestic bins can be used.

**Social distancing**

Social distancing of 1metres should be maintained wherever possible.

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| Staff can work face to face as long as they are able to keep 1 metres apart  Staff cannot work face to face if they are closer than 1 metres  Staff can work back to back  Staff can work side by side |  |

**Desk checklist**

**You should ensure that your work stations are cleaned regularly, particularly if you are working in an office that requires you to hot desk.**

At the start and end of each day you should:

• Clean the following with a disinfectant wipe: - Work surface - Chair arms - Keyboard and mouse - Telephone

• Remove any rubbish, cups and dishes you have used and clean or dispose of them appropriately

• Wash your hands after cleaning your desk. If you are hot-desking, you should not leave any personal items on the desk overnight

• You should work with your manager and your team to think about how you can best organise your work area, including considering whether staff are able to work from home.

• To ensure social distancing, teams should work two metres apart wherever possible. You can also arrange your seating so that you can sit side by side or back to back, to avoid face to face contact.

**Key principles for shared spaces:**

* Good ventilation (opening window, door or air conditioning)
* Desks will be 1 metres apart or 1 metre and back to back
* Hand hygiene facilities will be available (alcohol hand rub or a sink with soap and towels)
* Surface disinfection wipes will be available
* Avoid car sharing with non-household contacts

**Top tips:**

• If your work allows, work with your team to agree specific shift patterns for ‘groups’ of colleagues (sometimes known as a cohort), so that a small number of you work the same shifts as the same teams, limiting social interaction.

• Where possible, you can stagger the times that you arrive at and leave work and your lunch breaks or arrange a working at home rota with your line manager.

• Ensure that shared equipment, such as printers, are cleaned regularly.

• Ensure hands are cleaned before handling shared items including kettles, beverages, printers etc

• Meetings should continue where possible to be held via Microsoft Teams

• Where meetings have to take place, face to face social distancing must be maintained during the meeting.

• Limit attendance at face to face meetings to key individuals

• In addition to twice weekly testing, do an ‘on the day’ lateral flow device test prior to attending any face to face sessions likely to have more than 10 attendees e.g training or induction.

**FAQs**

**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 national guidelines applicable to all members of the public. Once you are on hospital premises we expect you to wear a surgical mask inside our buildings (clinical areas), and outside if you are unable to socially distance. You will need to put on a mask when entering a Trust building, before you get to your department.

**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 dispose of your mask in the correct waste bin and decontaminate your hands.

**I work in an office - do I have to wear a mask all day while I work or just when I go outside of the office?** No, you no longer need to wear a face mask when strictly in non-clinical areas. If you access a ‘non-clinical’ area via a clinical area then you will still need to wear a face mask. Outside the office, in corridors and other areas of the hospital you do need to wear a mask.

**How often do I need to change my mask?** Masks may be worn for sessional use in clinical areas.It is good practice to change your mask when leaving the clinical area. In non-clinical areas it should be changed if soiled damp or uncomfortable.

**Can we remove our mask to eat and drink?** You will need to maintain 1m distance from your colleagues when eating or drinking. You may have to re-schedule tea and lunch breaks so rest areas can be used safely.

**Do I need to change my mask even if I am only taking it off for a short time?** Your mask can be removed and folded in on itself. Provided you decontaminate your hands afterwards you can re-use the same mask. Don’t leave your mask on the table or other shared surfaces. Generally surgical masks with elastic ear hooks, can be reused if they are not soiled, damp or uncomfortable.

**Do I have to wear a mask outside?** If you are able to maintain the 2m distance between yourself and colleagues outside you will not be required to wear your mask. If you are unsure that you can achieve this you should always wear a mask.

**Rob Haigh, Martin Still and CAG 30/5/22**