



Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

Statement on personal protective equipment (PPE) during COVID-19

PPE provision for health and social care workers in the UK

The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh ('the College'), and other professional medical groups, have lobbied the UK Government and devolved administrations as a matter of urgency about Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health and social care workers (HSCW) in all care settings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The College recognises two main issues:

A. Guidance on use of PPE

The College welcomes the revised national [UK guidance on PPE](#) use published today as the health and care community leads the fight against COVID-19.

It details a more extensive range of aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) (procedures that are believed to generate aerosols and droplets) and provides advice that fits more closely with evolving clinical experience and evidence from other countries and clinicians' personal perception of risk in the different care environments in which they work.

The shift from single to sessional use of some elements of PPE is pragmatic as is the recognition that individual clinical risk assessment should inform use.

The inclusion in one document of care workers in all clinical settings both within and outside hospitals is also welcome.

The College believes that, where possible, the use of gowns with additional aprons is preferable to aprons alone in many situations, as evidenced in many countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The College further believes that the guidance should be seen **as the minimum acceptable standards** and not subject to local modification to a lower standard of protection.

B. Stocks and Distribution of PPE

In Scotland the College was reassured by direct communication from the Scottish Government late last week that has now been formally advised in a [public statement](#). Stocks of PPE appear sufficient for several weeks and methods and pace of distribution have been improved, as the College understands it. In a public statement, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Jeane Freeman MSP, said "We currently have adequate stocks of PPE – equating to six weeks' worth of hospital stock for the most critical items". The College welcomes the openness and transparency of the Scottish Government in providing this information, and the modelling of ongoing PPE requirements that they are undertaking. The College's expectation is that the UK Government replicates the approach taken by the Scottish Government, in relation to PPE.

This College and other Royal Colleges have already released a [statement](#) about the situation in Northern Ireland.

The situation in England and Wales regarding stocks and distribution is more difficult to describe with certainty. Stocks are described as 'good' but the College's Fellows and Members in England and Wales suggest that there is still substantial inconsistency in speed of delivery and accessibility of all elements. Publication of details of stock and methods of distribution, as has happened in Scotland, would support HSCW at this time.

Overall, although the College considers that progress has been made around the supply of and guidance pertaining to PPE, we remain concerned about the imbalanced nature of the situation across the UK and the inequity in standards of patient care and protection of HSCW that this creates.

Clearly, clinicians have a responsibility to use PPE in a way that combines best care for their patients with best protection for themselves and their colleagues and that prevents inappropriate overuse of PPE elements, which might lead to stock depletion too quickly.

In return, our governments have a responsibility to:

- Provide updated information on a frequent basis regarding stocks and distribution of PPE
- Listen to clinician experience on PPE and modify guidance in response to that experience
- Create a simple means by which deficiencies of PPE elements can be directly reported, matched with a rapid response to that deficiency.

These measures will help sustain the confidence of the profession through the challenging weeks and months ahead.