



Delyth Jewell MS
Member of the Senedd for South Wales East

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3 February 2022

Dear Delyth,

Thank you for your question in the Senedd about the use of Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) and your follow up correspondence including the link to the most recent update to the UK Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidance (updated 17 January 2022). The guidance, as you identify, may be found [here](#).

Ensuring that all health and social care workers have the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and are able to practice safely have been consistent priorities for Welsh Government. I am pleased to confirm that, since the start of the pandemic, more than one billion items of PPE have been issued across health and social care.

It is widely acknowledged that the higher transmissibility of the Omicron variant increases the risk of transmission of COVID-19 infection within hospitals and other closed settings although it is well established that the principal driver for nosocomial transmission is an increased rate of community transmission.

I also understand that transmissibility is increased in the Omicron variant due to the characteristics of the virus itself and that there is no evidence of a different physical route of spread; in particular there is no evidence of a change in stability over longer distances in air.

Like all UK nations, Wales continues to adhere to the UK IPC guidance including recommendations on PPE. The guidance is based on a continuous review of the international evidence base and is issued jointly by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Public Health Wales (PHW), Public Health Agency (PHA) Northern Ireland, NHS National Services Scotland, UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and NHS England as official guidance.

Multiple checks on compliance with this and other guidance have been undertaken by health boards, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales and the Health and Safety Executive. The guidance has been recently updated but in respect of the use of RPE the content and message has not been changed. Rather, the introduction to the guidance specifies that the

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

wording of the section that is included in your email has been modified with the purpose of clarifying guidelines that have been in existence for several months.

The UK chief medical and nursing officers recently asked the UK IPC cell to look again at the evidence for long range aerosol spread and the potential requirement for expanded use of enhanced RPE. The review concluded that there is no more evidence for this than previously and that the current UK IPC guidance remains fit for purpose. A consensus statement to this effect was agreed by UK Senior Clinicians and published on 17 December 2021 and may be found at this link [UK IPC Cell consensus statement in response to the emergence of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-ipc-cell-consensus-statement-in-response-to-the-emergence-of-the-omicron-variant-of-sars-cov-2)

In accordance with the UK IPC guidance, FFP3 masks are supplied to all NHS staff engaged in aerosol generating procedures and in other circumstances where a local risk assessment suggests a continuing risk of infection transmission despite other protective measures being in place.

We have frequently reiterated that the guidance must be implemented locally according to local risk assessments and plans and that those risk assessments should be documented and explained to staff.

A letter from the Chief Nursing Officer and Deputy Chief Medical Officer 'Re: Implications of SARS-CoV-2 Omicron variant for nosocomial transmission of COVID-19 infection in hospitals and closed settings' was issued on 13 December 2021. This reinforced the message to health boards that if it is decided that extended use of FFP3 masks is required in specific environments then their implementation must be carried out correctly in terms of fit testing, maintenance of stocks, training on use, donning and doffing and safe areas for removal and disposal as well as correct use of the masks.

To be clear, Welsh Government has no role in the formulation of the UK IPC guidance; we do however have a responsibility to ensure the supply of PPE which is appropriate for need. This, I am pleased to say, we do and have done throughout the pandemic.

You will be interested to learn that the Chief Executive Officer for NHS Wales has written to health boards to remind them of their responsibility to provide respiratory protective equipment (RPE) in accordance with the guidance.

I hope that this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

Eluned Morgan AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services