

Frequently Asked Questions related to COVID-19 in a non-healthcare setting

The following FAQs have been developed alongside the [national guidance on COVID-19](#) issued by Public Health Scotland on 14 April 2020 jointly between Scottish Government and COSLA to help Local Government employees understand the national COVID-19 advice. This advice does not seek to replace that of your employer and you should refer to your own Councils guidance on how they are responding to Covid-19 locally. They will have clearly set out what measures they are putting in place in order to:

- I. keep employees and service users safe;
- II. follow UK and Scottish Government Advice in relation to limiting the spread of Covid-19; and
- III. keep delivering critical services to our communities.

In regard to guidance implementation within Scotland the following will provide more detailed advice and support for staff when interpreting the FAQs:

- The [COVID-19: Information and Guidance for Social or Community Care & Residential settings](#) supports those working in social or community care and residential settings such as care at home, community healthcare settings social care amongst other.
- The [COVID-19: Information and Guidance for General \(non-Healthcare\) settings](#) supports those working in a range of settings outside of health and social care such as educational settings, hospitality, outreach service, transport and other such disciplines and businesses.

The FAQs below deal only with matters that have been agreed nationally or where national guidance has been set out, including that from the Health Protection Scotland which has been agreed by the four UK Chief Medical Officers - it will signpost you to your own local authority where the issue is more appropriately addressed at local level. You will find the relevant links to all appropriate national guidance and this will be updated as circumstances develop. Should you have any queries, concerns or issues you should contact your own Council's personnel helpline or Trade Union branch for advice.

1. I now have the PPE that I need to carry out my role. Where will I learn how best to fit this to reduce risk of infection?

Your manager will ensure that you receive training on correctly donning and doffing PPE as per the [guidance for social or community care and residential settings](#)

Where you haven't received training on use of the PPE you require to carry out your role you should speak in the first instance to your line manager. If they cannot help, please raise your concerns with your local HR department or local Trade Union branch.

2. I am protected with an apron and gloves however my arms have no protection and therefore can my uniform become affected?

If you work in the health and social care sector and have been in contact with symptomatic people, uniforms should be transported home in a disposable plastic bag. Uniforms should be laundered daily, and:

- separately from other household linen
- in a load not more than half the machine capacity
- at the maximum temperature the fabric can tolerate, then ironed or tumble dried.

As per [NHS inform](#) maintaining good hygiene such as regularly washing your hands will also prevent transmission of infections.

3. How will I know whether the homes I visit are COVID-19 free?

If there is a diagnosed or suspected COVID 19 patient you will be informed of that by your line manager. Your employer should assess the risk and advise you of any additional precaution/control measures required. If you suspect that a service user has contracted COVID 19, you should follow the [guidance for social or community care and residential settings](#).

Where you have a concern that measures could be put in place but are not, you should speak in the first instance to your line manager. If they cannot help, please raise your concerns with your local HR department or local Trade Union branch.

4. My role is going into homes to do essential repairs. Should I have PPE to be protected in the same way and health and social care workers?

There is no requirement for you to wear PPE unless you normally wear this. Ask the occupant to maintain 2 metres (social distancing) and carry hand gel or hand wipes to ensure you can carry out hand hygiene when leaving the home.

If there is a diagnosed or suspected COVID 19 patient you will be informed of that by your line manager. Your employer should assess the risk and advise you of any additional precaution/control measures required. If you suspect that a service user has contracted COVID 19, you should follow the [guidance for social or community care and residential settings](#).

Where you have a concern that measures could be put in place but are not, you should speak in the first instance to your line manager. If they cannot help, please raise your concerns with your local HR department or local Trade Union branch.

5. Even where I'm not coming into contact with someone, how do I protect myself from contamination from surfaces?

There are general principles individuals can follow to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including COVID-19. Individuals should:

- Wash hands regularly.
- Wash hands with soap and water; or use alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) where available before eating and drinking
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands

As per [NHS inform](#) maintaining good hygiene such as regularly washing your hands will also prevent transmission of infections.

6. There are different types of facemasks. How do I know which one I need to use?

If you work in the health and social care sector, guidance on the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic is provided at via the [information and guidance for social or community care and residential settings](#) page.

Where you are uncertain you should speak in the first instance to your line manager. If they cannot help, please raise your concerns with your local HR department or local Trade Union branch.

7. How should I be cleaning my own equipment and vehicle?

Clean inside your vehicle routinely with a household detergent or a wipe, paying particular attention to any high contact areas such as door handles.

Depending on the type of equipment used and if this comes into contact with others during the course of your working day you may want to disinfect using a disinfectant which states on the label that it can destroy viruses and bacteria.

Where you have concerns that measures could be put in place but are not you should speak in the first instance to your line manager. If they cannot help, please raise your concerns with your local HR department or local Trade Union branch.

Colleagues should encourage and support each other to maintain these basic hygiene rules at all times.

8. Should I have PPE if I'm working in a laundry dealing with clothing that are potentially contaminated?

Your employer /manager should advise you on the correct PPE and this should be part of your usual working routine.

Do not shake dirty laundry, this minimises the possibility of dispersing virus through the air.

After handling dirty laundry ensure hand hygiene is carried out.

9. When will testing of essential workers begin?

The Scottish Government has published guidance for the NHS about how to use testing capacity in laboratories in order to enable key workers to be back at work when that is safe. NHS Boards have been asked to prioritise using available testing capacity to address critical service pressures in health and social care services. This gives them the flexibility they need to direct testing to address local needs, including needs in social care.

This guidance is available online here at [testing guidance](#)

Employers should speak to their local NHS health protection team for advice on localised prioritisation plans.

10. I work in an additional support needs setting what support should be given to ensure hygiene measures are followed? Should I wear PPE?

[National guidance on COVID-19](#) is clear that all organisations should ensure that individuals are aware of and able to follow hygiene advice. They should do this by promoting good hand hygiene for all staff ensuring that adequate facilities are available for hand hygiene, including handwashing facilities and that they are adequately stocked or alcohol-based hand rub is available at key areas (e.g. entry and exit points).

The [NHS inform](#) sets out that general infection prevention and control measures should be followed. These are: hand hygiene; catch coughs and sneezes in tissues or cover mouth and nose with sleeve or elbow (not hands), dispose of the tissue into a bin and wash hands immediately; and practice social distancing.

The use of PPE is not currently recommended for the general population. The use of PPE should be informed by local policies. If a risk assessment indicates that a higher level of contamination may be present, for example within health and social care settings, where there maybe contamination with body fluids, then the need for PPE such as, an apron and gloves should be considered.

There is no evidence of benefit to support the use of facemasks outside healthcare and social care environments. Face masks may be advised for those diagnosed with or suspected to have COVID-19 to reduce spread of infection.

Further information can be found in the [national guidance on COVID 19](#) for non-healthcare settings.

11. How do I find out what PPE I need for my specific role and the environment in which I work?

Guidance on the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by health and social care workers, in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic is provided via the [national PPE guidance](#) and [information and guidance for social or community care and residential settings](#)

The 4 tables in section 5 summarise the PPE guidance for those working in different roles within health and social care.

Guidance for non-healthcare settings is at [national non-healthcare guidance](#)

This states that occupations should continue to use any PPE required as per local policies (business as usual). If a risk assessment of the setting indicates that a higher level of contamination may be present or there is visible contamination with body fluids, then the need for additional PPE should be considered. The PPE you require for your specific role and the environment in which you work will therefore be decided by your employer/manager.

The Scottish Government policy teams are also considering the need for sector-specific guidance and will consult with trade union representatives about the development of any sector-specific guidance.

12. As a care worker required to wear PPE, what should I do with my discarded PPE once I finish a visit?

If you are working with a COVID 19 or suspected patient, the PPE you use in line with [national PPE guidance](#) should be double bagged and left in a specific area of the Service users house for 72 hours before going into the general waste.

It is recommended that the bag should be marked with the date so that care workers, clients or family members know when it is safe to dispose of. If the service user is not a COVID 19 patient or suspected, then the PPE can be discarded into the normal bin in their home.

You should follow the key infection prevention and control measures as per [national Guidance on COVID-19](#).

13. As a worker required to wear PPE, I walk between visits. Should I be expected to carry multiple PPE for the full day?

Where you are required to carry extra PPE suitable bags or trollies can be provided as per discussion with your line manager. Where this may present difficulties arrangements should be made to keep small stocks of PPE in a service users house, provided it is secure and cannot be tampered with.

Where you have concerns that measures could be put in place but are not you should speak in the first instance to your line manager. If they cannot help, please raise your concerns with your local HR department or local Trade Union branch.

14. My employer has repeatedly told me that there isn't enough PPE and what is available will be pointed to NHS. How do I secure the PPE I require?

Your health and wellbeing is a top priority – we are in regular dialogue with Scottish Government about ensuring you get the support you need. Work is ongoing to ensure that appropriate supplies are being maintained and distributed to all services.

Where you have concerns about the availability of PPE make sure you raise these with your manager and or your local trade union branch.

15. I am a housing support officer and require PPE but have been told this is not necessary. I don't understand as my colleagues are now afforded PPE. I can justify why I need this, can I request this?

Your employer should be doing everything possible to protect your wellbeing, including observing providing the appropriate PPE for the tasks you are undertaking and maintaining **social distancing**. Where you have concerns about either of these that you should speak in the first instance to your line manager. If they cannot help, please raise your concerns with your local HR department or local Trade Union branch.

You should wear PPE only as appropriate to the task you are doing in line with the **national PPE guidance for health and social care staff providing care to COVID patients** or as per the **national non-healthcare guidance**.

Colleagues should encourage and support each other to maintain these basic hygiene rules at all times.

16. I work in an environment other than health and social care what PPE is required? How do I access the PPE I need? If I don't have access to PPE what should I do?

The decision about whether PPE should be worn is based solely on the scientific evidence of the potential risk of contracting the virus for the particular task you are undertaking as directed by the **national PPE guidance for health and social care staff**.

This virus is not airborne it is spread by droplets which are transferred directly, through coughing or sneezing, or by ingestion through the mouth, nose or eyes. That is why the clinical guidance focuses on the importance of handwashing, not touching your face, cleaning of surfaces and distance between individuals as preventative measures. It is therefore highly unlikely that you would contract the virus from an asymptomatic person (no symptoms) who is carrying the virus and why the guidance therefore focuses on the use of PPE for symptomatic people (showing symptoms).

Should you be concerned about a particular environment you should speak in the first instance to your line manager. If they cannot help, please raise your concerns with your local HR department or local Trade Union branch.

Colleagues should encourage and support each other to maintain basic hygiene rules at all times.

17. I travel and work with my colleague. Should I continue to do this?

Your employer should be putting in place measures to observe **social distancing**. Where you have concerns that **social distancing** measures could be put in place

but are not, you should speak in the first instance to your line manager. If they cannot help, please raise your concerns with your local HR department or local Trade Union branch.

Colleagues should encourage and support each other to maintain basic hygiene rules at all times.

18. If I don't have access to disposable bags for waste what should I do?

Where you don't have the equipment you require to carry out your role you should speak in the first instance to your line manager. If they cannot help, please raise your concerns with your local HR department or local Trade Union branch.

19. I work in a role where currently expected to work with up to 20 people (sometimes more). I believe this doesn't follow social distancing and lockdown guidance and I feel compromised. I appreciate this is an essential service but the people and my colleagues are being put at risk?

Your employer should be doing everything possible to observe **social distancing**. Where you have concerns that **social distancing** measures could be put in place but are not you should speak in the first instance to your line manager. If they cannot help, please raise your concerns with your local HR department or local Trade Union branch.

You should wear PPE only as appropriate to the task you are doing in line with the **national non-healthcare guidance**.

Colleagues should encourage and support each other to maintain these basic hygiene rules at all times.