**Guidance for Use of Masks in the Workplace**

1. **Introduction**

The Government has set out guidance instructing all workers in the NHS to wear face masks. We have outlined some of the most common questions below and will keep this updated as the situation evolves.

Please remember guidance is likely to change rapidly, so check back to see if you have the most up-to-date version of a document.

1. **Rationale for wearing a mask**

Hospital, social care and support workers may be subject to repeated risk of contact and droplet transmission from Covid-19 during their daily work.

All staff, clinical and non-clinical are required to wear a face mask when at work, and when moving between different areas in their work environments. This applies to staff working in all of our hospital sites.

Wearing a face mask does not replace social distancing and good hand hygiene.  **Staff should maintain 2 metre spacing at all times and wear a face mask at all times.**

The guidance on wearing a face mask applies to everyone working on our Trust sites including workers on PFI sites, and those employed as contractors. Visitors and outpatients attending hospital sites also need to wear a face mask.

1. **Face Masks**

A **face mask** is designed and manufactured to be used in a healthcare setting.  
A **face covering** is not designed for the same use, and is made from fabric or cloth and should cover your mouth and nose while allowing you to breathe comfortably.

* You can wear a face covering – i.e. the fabric covering, rather than a surgical mask - when travelling to and from work (face coverings are mandatory on public transport), or in areas where social distancing is difficult, such as in supermarkets.
* You must **not** wear a face covering instead of a surgical mask when moving around our sites. Only masks supplied by the Trust should be worn.

1. **Where to collect your mask**

Staff working in clinical areas already have access to face mask supplies, and should continue to access stock in the normal way.

We have installed mask donning and doffing stations at the main entrances of our Trust sites. Masks are also available from main reception areas and ward receptions; please obtain a mask from here if you are not able to get one at the main entrance.

Mask containers will also be available in departmental and administrative reception areas. Consider taking two at a time on your way in.

1. **Putting on your mask:**

* Wash or sanitise your hands before putting it on.
* Ensure the mask goes up to the bridge of your nose and all the way down under your chin.
* Tighten the loops or ties so it's snug around your face.
* Avoid touching your face, or the parts of the mask that cover your nose and mouth.
* Wash or sanitise your hands before taking it off.
* Use the ear loops to take the mask off and dispose of your mask in the bins provided by the doffing off station
* Wash or sanitise your hands after disposing of a used mask.

1. **How long can I wear each mask for?**

There is no set time, nor recommended number of masks you should use each day. It all depends on what you are doing. However, if your mask gets dirty, wet or damaged or if you touch the inside of it, then you should change to a new one (following the steps above).

When you take it off to eat or drink, you should dispose of the old mask, wash or sanitise your hands, and replace it with a new one once you have finished eating.

If you work in a clinical area, please dispose of your mask as usual in an orange-lined clinical waste bin or in the small paper bags provided until you get to an orange bin.

If you are working in an office or room alone you will not be expected to wear a mask, but when you leave the private work area to move through the building, for example on an errand or to get some lunch then you should put on a face mask.

In most cases face masks are safe for anyone to wear, regardless of health conditions. All staff working on Trust sites are now expected under national guidance to wear face masks in our buildings and when accessing these areas listed:

* Corridors.
* Lifts.
* Staircases.
* Any communal areas in the building.
* Keep your mask on when going to use the toilet.

For staff who are not used to wearing masks, they can initially feel restrictive, hot and uncomfortable, but for most, these feelings will improve in the short-term.

Face masks have been used in hospitals for years, and very few staff experience problems. However, if you do experience problems, speak to your line manager in the first instance. In the very unlikely event you experience an allergic reaction, please seek medical attention and contact Occupational Health.

Always consider the following points:

* Once a face mask is removed from the face, it should be thrown away and replaced with a new mask due to the risk of contamination of hands/surfaces with respiratory droplets. Always clean your hands after removing your mask.
* Once a face mask has been worn 'clinically' the mask should be disposed in a clinical waste bin before leaving the clinical area and a new mask applied
* Do not leave work with a face mask on when you finish work. They are for use on Trust premises and should be disposed of before leaving the premises. Face coverings should be worn on public transport.

1. **Outpatients and Visitors**

We are asking outpatients and members of the public to wear a face covering at all times when accessing our hospital premises.

There are some exceptions which include children under five years old and people with learning difficulties.

If a patient turns up at our hospitals without a face covering, they should be supplied with a face mask.

For some, wearing of a face mask/covering may be difficult, and therefore all other measures must also be considered and introduced. This could include social or physical distancing, timed appointments, being seen immediately and not kept in waiting rooms.

1. **Home working**

Staff should work from home if at all possible. The minimum number of staff should be on site at any time (approximately 30% as a guide). Ensure the home environment is suitable and provide equipment if necessary. Managers should maintain contact with you and colleagues to ensure your wellbeing.

1. **Your work space/environments**

Reduce congestion at entry and exit points by staggering your work start and finish time and avoid unnecessary journeys. Ensure you maintain the minimum recommended distance from your colleagues at all times.

Your work place should be mapped out and a maximum number of people each room can hold should be indicated;

* Desks should be positioned to work side by side or facing away from each other.
* Work stations should be cleaned between each occupant.
* Open windows, turn up ventilation and air conditioning systems to maximise airflow.

1. **Shared spaces**

* DO NOT hot desk or use work areas not assigned to you. Teams may share desks. They should be booked to one person for the day and touch points cleaned before and after.
* Use alternative working tools such as zoom to avoid face to face meetings. If face to face meetings are absolutely necessary, only the minimum number should attend in order to maintain social distancing. Avoid sharing equipment. Sanitizer should be available to wipe down the area before and after the meeting.
* Stagger your break times and try to use open spaces weather permitting. Only consume pre-packed meals onsite.
* Maintain social distancing in social areas and locker rooms. If using changing rooms or shower rooms leave them clean and tidy with personal items removed or locked away.
* One way and/or keep left systems will be in place where possible with signage in place to indicate traffic flow.