



Dr Susan Hopkins, Test and Trace and PHE Joint Medical Advisor  
Ms Ruth May, Chief Nursing Officer, NHS England

19 January 2021

Sent by Email

Dear Dr Hopkins & Ms May

**Guidance on use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the NHS to protect staff from the new variant of the Coronavirus.**

The Social Partnership Forum (SPF) which is made up of representatives from the DHSC, NHSEI, HEE, NHS Employers and the NHS trade unions has engaged with you and your colleagues during the pandemic on supply and use of PPE to protect NHS staff. We are really grateful for the open and engaging approach taken on this matter. This has helped address the concerns of the people we represent on whether staff leading the NHS response to the pandemic have the protection they need.

With the new variant of the virus and the increase in the transmission of COVID-19 by as much as 70 per cent we have had representation made to us and would like to understand whether PHE, along with NHS England, DHSC and the public health bodies from the devolved nations, have reviewed or plan to review [COVID-19 Guidance for the remobilisation of services within health and care settings - Infection prevention and control recommendations](#) as a result of this new variant. A particular key issue is the question of whether PPE requirements need to be upgraded in light of the new variant, and FFP3 masks issued as standard in all clinical settings.

Employers and trade union representatives have fed back their concerns on this issue as they want to ensure staff and patients are kept safe and the risk of spreading the virus is limited as much as possible.

Please let us know what action has been taken or planned in response to the new variant of the Coronavirus in regard to use of PPE in a healthcare setting. The COVID-19 SPF Engagement Group meets next on 26 January so a response before this date would be really helpful. We will be happy to feed back any messages from PHE on this topic to those we represent.

Yours sincerely

Handwritten signature of Sara Gorton in black ink.

Sara Gorton  
Head of Health  
UNISON  
Trade Union SPF Chair

Handwritten signature of Rebecca Smith in black ink.

Rebecca Smith  
Managing Director  
NHS Employers  
Employer SPF Chair

Cc: Peter Howitt, Director of PPE Policy, Department of Health and Social Care  
Prerana Issar, Chief People Officer, NHS England and NHS Improvement  
Tom Simons, Chief HR and OD Officer, NHS England and NHS Improvement