



By Email Only

Date: 26th January 2021

Re: Update on PPE - FFP2 Masks

Dear Colleagues,

In the past two months the situation with respect to the prevention and control of Covid-19 infection in the healthcare setting has been extremely challenging. The number of patients and healthcare workers acquiring COVID-19 in hospital has risen rapidly. In the week ending January 17th there were 442 (provisional) reported case of probable or confirmed hospital acquired Covid-19 in patients and 846 new diagnoses in healthcare workers. Multiple COVID-19 outbreaks were reported in several major hospitals. Likewise long-term residential care facilities are facing major challenges with an increase in transmission of infection. The increased infection is considered to be related to the very high number of cases in the community and the new variants of the virus which are more infectious.

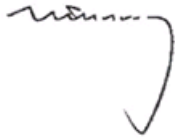
With regard to PPE, it is important to emphasise that PPE is only one element of a comprehensive approach to IPC as outlined in HPSC/AMRIC guidance documents. PPE is only likely to be effective when used in conjunction with rigorous adherence to the fundamentals of IPC including hand hygiene, environmental management, early identification of people with COVID-19 and the application of contact and droplet precautions.

On January 12th I advised that, given the current surge and the concern re increased potential for airborne transmission it was appropriate to allow greater scope for institutional risk assessment and individual risk assessment with respect to use of respirator masks in situations in which surgical masks were generally recommended.

Recently HIQA have completed a review of international guidance on IPC. In the context of the HIQA review and recent experience the AMRIC team has reviewed the current guidance and has advised me that it proposes to update its guidance on use of personal protective equipment. Based on the fifth update of the European Centre for Disease Control document "Infection prevention and control and preparedness for COVID-19 in healthcare settings" **the updated HPSC/AMRIC guidance will include a recommendation that healthcare workers in community and hospital settings should have access to a well-fitted respirator mask (FFP2) and eye protection when in contact with possible or confirmed COVID-19 cases and COVID-19 contacts. In the context of a ward or facility based outbreak or a COVID-19 assessment hub it is appropriate to consider all patients in the setting as suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases.** A surgical mask and visor also offer a high degree of protection. These may be more comfortable for and preferred by some staff. A surgical mask is appropriate for non-patient facing activity and when caring for patients where there is no suspicion of COVID-19 and there is no evidence of transmission in the service.

A comprehensive approach to IPC is outlined in HPSC/AMRIC guidance documents which will continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis in light of emerging evidence and experience nationally and internationally. I would again like to thank you all for your enormous efforts to keep you, your colleagues and patients safe during this difficult time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colm Henry', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Dr Colm Henry
Chief Clinical Officer