



Health protection

Public and professional responsibilities

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As we move into the next phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, that of beginning to recover and restore life in general as well as health and care services, the way we carry out our day to day activities, counterintuitively, may become more difficult. The certainty of lockdown and social isolation in the community has been replaced with a myriad of phased instructions to the public; the concentration of medical resources to accommodate COVID-19 cases has moved to a gradual restoration of more complex planned care in an endemic situation.

Therefore, as the situation evolves, it has become ever more important to maintain clear, recognised public health principles that can be widely shared and supported with the population and healthcare workforce alike and help protect those who are most at risk.

These are the continuing importance of:

- Hand washing
- Social distancing
- Environmental cleaning of surfaces
- Respiratory hygiene
- Use of face masks as required
- Cooperation with the Test and Trace system with responsible social isolation when symptomatic or having been traced as a contact.

In addition, within the healthcare workplace, healthcare professionals should:

- Promote these general safety and infection control principles by their own actions and education of their patients and the public
- Adhere to the infection protection and control (IPC) guidance of their organisation
- Use appropriate personal protection equipment (PPE) for their working circumstances – adhering to agreed guidance and the conclusions of individual risk assessment and local environmental factors
- Use facemasks as required
- Apply social distancing in all areas of the workplace unless otherwise required for clinical reasons, where appropriate PPE should be worn.



It is a professional responsibility to ensure that these principles are adhered to and actively supported and promoted.

However, to enable these actions employing organisations have a responsibility to:

- Ensure that the workplace environment facilitates all staff to be able to adhere to the principles both in clinical areas and in changing, rest, eating and training areas
- Complete risk assessments, in particularly recognising risk for those from BAME backgrounds
- Ensure that appropriate PPE is made available where needed following clinical risk assessment in all cases
- Support staff in identifying when they themselves have symptoms or are identified as a contact of a case and need to take appropriate self-isolation action.

While it may be challenging to achieve all this in a space constrained working environment, it is crucial that healthcare professionals and NHS organisations are setting the best possible example and able to educate and inform patients and the public.