

Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol/
Prif Weithredwr GIG Cymru
Grŵp Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol

Director General Health and Social Services/
NHS Wales Chief Executive
Health and Social Services Group



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Our Ref: CH/JP/LC

30 June 2022

Dear Dr Sidley,

Thank you for your letter of 8 June 2022 regarding the 'Smile Free' campaign and your concerns about the use of face masks and coverings in healthcare facilities in Wales. I agree with you that the interests of the patient should be put first and so I am pleased to be able to say that patient safety has been prioritised throughout the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring that NHS Wales has adhered to guidance based upon the best and most current evidence. This includes guidance on Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and face masks/coverings.

Through membership of the UK Infection Prevention and Control (UK IPC) group, Wales has played an active part in the development and continual evaluation of the [UK IPC guidance](#). This has been issued jointly by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Public Health Wales (PHW), Public Health Agency (PHA) Northern Ireland, NHS National Services Scotland, UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and NHS England as official guidance.

The UK IPC guidance has been consistent with recommendations from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and has been endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). It is a measure of the speed and responsiveness of the UK IPC group work that new evidence has been assimilated in five hundred iterations of the guidance over two years. As of 1 April 2022 health and social care organisations have been advised to return to using the [National Infection Prevention and Control Manual \(NIPCM\)](#), which is similarly based upon a continuous review of the evidence, as the primary source of general IPC guidance and principles.

In conjunction with this, Public Health Wales has published SARS CoV-2 pathogen specific guidance which, in [section 4.1](#), addresses the extended use of masks in relation to source control.

This guidance notes that the World Health Organization (WHO) makes a strong recommendation that in areas of known or suspected community or cluster SARS-CoV-2 transmission, universal masking is recommended in health care facilities.

As you will be aware, the legal requirement to wear face masks in health and social care settings in Wales was removed on 30 May.

On 20 May, prior to the law being changed, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Chief Nursing Officer wrote to NHS Chief Executive Officers, Executive Directors of Nursing and Medical Directors advising that the use of face masks for staff and face masks or coverings for all patients and visitors in areas that are dealing with known or suspected cases of SARS-CoV-2 and other respiratory infections should be continued in compliance with guidance contained in the NIPCM.

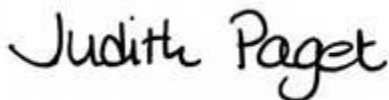
The letter also made it clear that once the legal requirement to wear a mask was lifted, it would remain the responsibility of health boards to ensure that staff and visitors continue to be advised and supported to use face masks and coverings in public areas of hospitals and other clinical settings.

The message that health boards and trusts should be promoting the wearing of face masks to staff, patients and visitors, has been reiterated by Welsh Government on several occasions and I am pleased to see the recent announcement by some health boards of a return to 'universal masking' during this time of increased COVID-19 admissions to hospital. New variants of coronavirus continue to circulate in the community and we know, from experience during the pandemic, that higher community transmission rates lead to increases in COVID-19 admissions to hospital. The people in hospitals and other clinical settings are of course those most vulnerable to severe illness.

Therefore, whilst there is no legal requirement to wear a face mask or covering in healthcare settings, I have been clear that there is an expectation that health boards, trusts and primary care organisations should continue to promote the use of face masks by staff and visitors.

I hope that this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judith Paget". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Judith Paget CBE

Copied to:

PS First Minister

PS Minister for Health and Social Services