



Smile Free Campaign
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Dear Smile Free Campaign

Thank you for your letter of 8 June 2022 received by Caroline Lamb, NHS Scotland Chief Executive (and Director General for Health and Social Care). Your letter raises the concerns of the Smile Free Campaign around staff, patients and visitors wearing facemasks in health and social care settings. As a Senior Policy Manager in the Chief Nursing Officer Directorate at the Scottish Government, I have been asked to respond on behalf of the NHS Scotland Chief Executive and Director General for Health and Social Care.

The Scottish Government has developed guidance on the [extended use of face masks and face coverings in hospitals, primary care and wider community healthcare](#). Across health and community healthcare, the fundamental principles of infection prevention and control (IPC) are essential for preventing the spread of COVID-19. Compliance with hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, safely optimising ventilation and the appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in line with national guidance continues to be critical in all settings and at all times.

This guidance does not replace these measures, but aims to supplement them. The extended use of facemask and face covering guidance explains that as community COVID-19 control measures are gradually stood down as well as a de-escalation of COVID-19 IPC measures in health and social care settings; certain settings remain where the extended use of facemasks and/ or face covering is still necessary.

Facemasks and face coverings are still strongly recommended in hospitals, primary care and within wider community healthcare as a result of these settings hosting more clinically vulnerable individuals for whom COVID-19 infection still poses a greater risk. It is strongly recommended that staff who work in hospitals, primary care and wider community healthcare settings (excluding care homes) wear a fluid

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resistant surgical mask (FRSM) when providing direct care to individuals. However staff are able to use their professional judgement and risk assessment in instances where it is necessary to remove the FRSM for a short period when providing such care, for example, when the person they are supporting/ caring for is showing signs of distress or to support communication and understanding.

There will be instances of staff who suffer from breathing difficulties, or suffer from genuine discomfort or distress when wearing a facemask or face covering. The Scottish Government expects staff to be fully supported and appropriate steps taken locally to implement the guidance in a way that has regard to staff well-being. A workforce risk assessment should be undertaken in conjunction with occupational health departments. Health and social care staff are not required to wear a facemask or face covering during mealtimes in staff restaurants but should do so when not seated at a table, such as when queueing, entering or leaving the canteen.

Staff are able to remove facemasks or face coverings when working alone in an office or when seated in a well ventilated office after appropriate hand hygiene. Patients in hospitals and residential adult healthcare settings (excluding care homes) are strongly encouraged to wear an FRSM or face covering however we would also like to reassure you that the Scottish Government expects that no patient or resident should be refused treatment or care and Boards/ Care providers should consider other mitigating measures if patients/ residents are unable to wear a face mask. Visitors to hospitals and social care settings are also encouraged to wear a facemask or face covering however should not be refused access to their loved one as a result of choosing to not wear one.

Scotland's COVID-19 mitigations and guidance have always been based on the latest evidence base. NSS Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection (ARHAI) Scotland have undertaken a series of reviews of the available evidence. Section 5.1 of the Rapid review of the literature: Assessing the infection prevention and control measures for the prevention and management of COVID-19 in health and care settings relates to evidence regarding facemasks and I have included a link to this [evidence review here](#).

Finally, I would like to reassure you that all IPC measures are kept under review in light of new and emerging evidence. Thank you again for taking the time to write to the Scottish Government and raising your concerns.

I hope you will find this helpful.

Yours sincerely

Syed Kerbalai

CNO : Healthcare Associated Infection (HCAI) and Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Policy Unit (PU)

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