

To: Via email – Dr Gary Sidley

NHS England
Wellington House
133-155 Waterloo Road
London
SE1 8UG

4 October 2022

Dear Dr Sidley

RE: The Smile Free Campaign

Thank you for your letters to Amanda Pritchard dated 26 May and 3 August. I am replying on behalf of Amanda as national lead for infection prevention and control (IPC) for the NHS in England and I apologise for not replying sooner.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK IPC Guidance published initially by Public Health England and subsequently by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) have been continuously reviewed in response to the changing epidemiology of SARS-CoV-2 and the emergence of new evidence and science on the reduction of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 within health and care settings. These reviews have included for example, guidance and assessments of the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), and Data Evaluation for Learning and Epidemics (DELVE).

As you note, on 27th May 2022, subsequent to the drafting of your original letter, UKHSA archived the UK IPC seasonal respiratory guidance and published [COVID -specific information and advice for health and care professionals](#). This document sets out that in health and care settings, non-pharmaceutical interventions (such as mask wearing and enhanced ventilation) may be used, depending on local prevalence and risk assessment, with the aim to reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2. Based on the most recent guidance from the World Health Organisation (WHO), the [letter to the NHS](#) sets out advice to support organisations to interpret the UKHSA's guidance on mask wearing.

The evidence for the widespread use of masks as a COVID-19 source control measure in healthcare settings is strong. An in-depth analysis of the impact of masks and other IPC measures in hospitals in England during the first wave of the pandemic [<https://assets.researchsquare.com/files/rs-1030531/v1/9e77571a-e0e1-428d-a72c-59525fa36f4d.pdf?c=1635533497>] shows that these measures had a significant impact in reducing transmission of COVID-19 and preventing patient harm.

Thank you again for your letters and for raising your concerns around this important issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ruth May". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dame Ruth May, DBE

Chief Nursing Officer, England

NHS England