

## COVID-19: Provision and use of face masks

### 1. Introduction

Pennon are continuing to review Government, Public Health England and World Health Organisation recommendations with regards to the COVID-19 virus and PPE recommendations for key workers, outside of the front-line NHS employees. In order to ensure the health and wellbeing of our employees and agency staff, we are taking steps to ensure our employees have every opportunity to reassure themselves following the changing landscape of government guidance in relation to the COVID-19 virus. This document should be read in conjunction with other advice and guidance which is available through your line manager or on the HomeSafe website (<https://www.homesafe-me.co.uk/coronavirus/>) which should be checked regularly.

Guidance from Public Health England (PHE) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) is consistent and clear, in that there is very little evidence of widespread benefit from the use of face masks outside the clinical or care settings, where they play a very important role. However, Pennon recognises the anxiety and worry this may cause where individuals have to work in close proximity with others to enable essential work to be undertaken, and where social distancing of 2 metres is not always achievable.

### 2. Scope

The scope of this guidance applies to Pennon and all subsidiary businesses; employees, agency workers and contractors who cannot maintain the social distance guidance of 2 metres either through the activity they are undertaking or by travelling in vehicles.

### 3. Coronavirus (COVID-19)

There are two main routes of transmission of the COVID-19 virus: respiratory and contact.

**Respiratory** droplets are generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Any person who is in close contact with someone who has respiratory symptoms, for example, sneezing or coughing, is at risk of being exposed to potentially infectious respiratory droplets.

**Contact** - droplets may also land on surfaces where the virus could remain viable; thus, the immediate environment of an infected individual can serve as a source of transmission, (known as contact transmission), where the individual touches a contaminated surface and then touches their face, mouth or eyes.

The most important control for preventing the spread of any infection is good hygiene. This cannot be over-emphasised. Good hygiene practices should already be in place and these must be maintained. All employees must: -

- Use tissues to cover their mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze (CATCH IT)
- Place used tissues in a bin (or bag) as soon as possible (BIN IT)
- Wash their hands regularly with soap and water (KILL IT)
- Clean surfaces and contact points regularly to get rid of germs (KILL IT)

#### **4. Face Masks**

Face masks are particularly effective in healthcare and clinical environments where front line workers are in contact with symptomatic patients. Waste and water industry workers are unlikely to encounter the same level of risk as healthcare workers. To be effective, face masks must be worn correctly, changed frequently, removed properly, disposed of safely and used in combination with good universal hygiene behaviour. Research shows that compliance with these recommended behaviours reduces over time when wearing face masks for prolonged periods.

**Where a risk assessment has previously indicated that an employee would be expected to wear respiratory protection as part of their normal job then they should continue to do so.**

There are two main types of face mask available for use: -

- Disposable Surgical Face Masks – these may help reduce the risk of someone with no symptoms from spreading the virus to others;
- FFP2/3 Face Masks – will prevent respiratory cross infection through droplets and provide a higher level of protection.

Face masks will be provided to workers, on request, where concerns over their ability to achieve social distancing is compromised. Whilst the use of a face mask is not mandatory, except where risk assessment has previously indicated their use as part of their normal job, workers will have the option to request one for their own reassurance.

If you wear a mask, then you must know how to use it and dispose of it properly. You should follow this advice: -

- Before putting on a mask, clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Cover mouth and nose with mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask.

- Avoid touching the mask while using it; if you do, clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Replace the mask with a new one as soon as it is damp and do not re-use single-use masks.
- To remove the mask: remove it from behind (do not touch the front of mask); discard immediately in a closed bin; clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

## **5. General advice where social distancing cannot be achieved**

For all tasks and activities where social distancing guidance cannot be maintained, the following controls shall be confirmed: -

- they have not had any known contact with persons with Covid-19 or any person showing signs or symptoms within the previous 2 weeks.
- they are not in the increased-risk health category.
- they currently have no signs and symptoms of COVID-19

Prior to starting the task or activity, all workers involved must undertake hand washing using soap and water, or use hand sanitiser if this is not available.

### **5.1 Further advice when travelling in vehicles**

The following additional controls apply when staff are travelling in the same vehicle either to a job/site or to be able to undertake their role (when no other alternative transport arrangements can be made or are available).

- Health questions as above to be confirmed
- Maximum 2 people per vehicle, (even if the vehicle has more than 2 seats)
- Touch points in the vehicle to be cleaned every day after work e.g. door handles, dashboard, seatbelts, locks, etc.
- Plan shortest possible route and keep time in the vehicle to a minimum
- If possible, keep vehicle windows open whilst travelling and when vehicle is stationary.
- Disposable surgical masks can be requested by those travelling in the vehicle for the duration of the journey.
- Follow the guidance on use, maintenance and disposal of face masks in section 4.

### **5.2 Further advice when working in close proximity (< 2 metres)**

For all close proximity tasks or activities, the following additional controls shall be applied:

- Health questions as above to be confirmed
- Carry out Dynamic Risk Assessment prior to starting task.
- Follow your standard Task Safety Instruction, Safe Operating Procedure, Safe System of Work and Risk Assessment defined for the activity.
- Consider increased ventilation for tasks in enclosed spaces
- The following PPE is available on request; disposable gloves (nitrile or acceptable alternative), Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) FFP2/3 respirator. Where practical a full-face visor to be worn over the FFP2/3 respirator or safety goggles
- Hand wash before and after PPE removal, using soap and water or hand sanitiser.

## **6. Supporting information for employees**

- (i) Homesafe COVID-19 website: <https://www.homesafe-me.co.uk/coronavirus/>
- (ii) HSSA team