

RCN Scotland Response to the Scottish Government consultation on Future pandemic Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supplies in Scotland

March 2022

Consultation Questions

Part 1: Lessons Learned

Learning the lessons from the experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic was a key recommendation from Audit Scotland. As part of the PPE Futures Programme, the Scottish Government has undertaken work to understand the lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic. The Scottish Government has been working with various stakeholders to capture these lessons. Please indicate whether you agree with the key findings:

1. Effective mechanisms of collaboration and communication between the Scottish Government and stakeholders are an integral part of facilitating the supply of PPE in pandemic circumstances and must be implemented into any future strategy.

Agree

Disagree

No preference

1.1 A reformed stockpiling and buying approach for pandemic PPE is required.

Agree

Disagree

No preference

1.2 Primary Care and adult Social Care require a long term and sustainable PPE supply strategy.

Agree

Disagree

No preference

1.3 Cross public sector collaboration with the NHS on PPE supply issues should be considered as part of a future strategy.

Agree

Disagree

No preference

1.4 A surge capacity should be incorporated into the future pandemic PPE supply and stockpiling arrangements to guarantee that PPE demand is met during the volatile early stages of any future pandemic.

Agree

Disagree

No preference

1.5 A future strategy also needs to consider how private businesses and third sector organisations can be as prepared as possible for future pandemics to ensure that they continue to deliver essential public services.

Agree

Disagree

No preference

1.6 We must build upon the progress made during the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of supporting new, domestic supply chains and the development of data modelling.

Agree
Disagree
No preference

2. Are there any other lessons learned that you think should be considered? If 'yes', please describe (preferably no more than 300 words).

Yes
No

In conflating the two separate issues of 'domestic supply chains and the development of data modelling' question 1.6 is deliberately leading and so we cannot answer it 'yes' or 'no'. Our position is that we have no preference as to 'domestic supply chains' but we agree with the need for 'the development of data modelling'.

The consultation acknowledges that the 'PPE required to prepare for any future pandemic could differ and will be decided upon in line with expert clinical guidance' but does not ask any lessons learned questions about this, despite it being as important a matter as supply. RCN's position on the airborne transmission of Covid-19 ([RCN position on personal protective equipment \(PPE\) for COVID-19 | Royal College of Nursing](#)) means that, for any future pandemic (which, whether of Covid-19 or not, is highly likely to involve the airborne transmission of a respiratory virus), the provision of FFP3 masks is absolutely paramount as is a proper programme of face fitting. In fact, face fitting should not wait until the arrival of the next pandemic but, rather, there should be ongoing continued access to face fitting for all appropriate staff along with an expectation that staff are re-face-fitted at an interval agreed nationally. We do not want to see a situation where the provision of masks to the frontline is delayed because of the need to face-fit before those masks can be safely used. For new staff, face-fitting may be usefully considered to be a pre-employment requirement.

Any supply chain must ensure the efficient and sufficient supply of FFP3 masks to all healthcare workers, whether they work in health or social care and regardless of sector or employer, accounting for how long a mask may be used for before it needs to be changed for a new mask.

Part 2: Preparing our PPE Stocks for Future Pandemics

3. Do you think that Scotland should have its own pandemic PPE stockpile? Please expand your answer if you wish (preferably no more than 300 words).

Yes
No
No preference

3.1 Do you have a preference as to which organisations or sectors should be able to access the PPE pandemic stockpile? If yes, please expand on your answer (preferably no more than 300 words).

Yes
No

All healthcare workers, whether they work in health or social care and regardless of sector or employer, should have timeous access to appropriate PPE whenever it is needed. Most, if not all, of them will play no part in their employer's arrangements for sourcing and providing PPE and the health and wellbeing of these workers must never be put at risk because of considerations affecting their employer that have nothing directly to do with them, such as those to do with costs, administration, contracts or logistics.

3.2 Do you have a view on how much the organisations or sectors that share the PPE stockpile should contribute to its costs? If yes, please expand on your answer (preferably no more than 300 words).

Yes

No

4. Do you think that public sector organisations working together with the NHS to buy PPE together would help support the Scottish PPE manufacturing base?

Yes

No

No preference

4.1 Do you think that public sector organisations working together with the NHS to buy PPE together would help Scotland to be more resilient in the event of a future pandemic?

Yes

No

No preference

4.2 For public sector respondents: Would your organisation be willing to participate in a collaborative buying approach for pandemic PPE with the NHS?

Yes

No

No preference

4.3 Please detail any other views that you have on the proposed cross public sector collaboration with the NHS on pandemic PPE supply (preferably no more than 300 words).

Any lessons learned about the efficiency and efficacy of cross public sector collaboration on PPE supply might usefully be applied to the supply of other items required by health and care services and the healthcare workforce as we have described it (i.e., in health or social care and regardless of sector or employer).

5. Should the Scottish Government have a role in supporting the private businesses providing an essential public service and the third sector with their PPE supply in the event of a future pandemic? If 'yes', please describe what role that should be (preferably no more than 300 words).

Yes

No

No preference

The Scottish Government's role should be to ensure that all healthcare workers, whether they work in health or social care and regardless of sector or employer, should have timeous access to appropriate PPE whenever it is needed. As noted in our response to question 3.1, the health and wellbeing of that workforce must never be put at risk because of considerations affecting their employer that have nothing directly to do with them.

5.1 If you answered 'yes' to Question 5, do you have an opinion on how this should be funded? If 'yes', please expand on your answer (preferably no more than 300 words).

Yes

No

No preference

6. Do you agree with the proposed pandemic PPE supply arrangements for your organisation or sector? If no, please describe what you believe should change (preferably no more than 300 words).

Yes

No

No preference

RCN does not have 'an organisation or sector' in the sense that these terms are used in this consultation. Our members work in multiple organisations and sectors, sometimes holding positions in more than one organisation or sector at the same time. We have already commented on our priorities for the proposed pandemic PPE supply arrangements but in terms of issues with the process during the current pandemic, we wish to highlight that...

During the first few months of the pandemic in particular, RCN Scotland and others repeatedly raised concerns around the supply of and guidance around the use of PPE across both health and social care settings. These concerns centred around three main issues: supply and access to PPE, guidance around the use of PPE and the re-use of single use PPE or the use of expired PPE. In March, April and May 2020, we wrote to and met with the First Minister, Cabinet Secretary for Health and the Chief Executive of the Health and Safety Executive [see <https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/news/uk-health-and-safety-regulator-must-intervene-to-protect-staff-as-ppe-issues-continue-170420-covid19>] amongst others to discuss these concerns. While issues around supply were evident in all sectors, we raised concerns that staff working in community settings had problems accessing any PPE at all in the early phase of the pandemic [see <https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/news/ppe-in-community-1-april-2020>]

Scottish members who responded to an RCN survey on PPE (carried out over the Easter weekend of 2020) [see <https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/news/ppe-survey-results-18-april-2020>] told us that there was still a lack of access to essential PPE. The survey found that 25% of those working in high risk environments still did not have their mask fit tested, 31% had not had training in putting on and taking off masks and 47% of those working in high risk settings had said they had been asked to re-use single use PPE.

These issues took several months to improve as global supply of PPE was increased, national distribution networks were established and our understanding of Covid transmission improved. In response to concerns around supply, expressed by the RCN and others, a social care triage hub was established and new supply routes for primary care and hospitals were set up. PPE guidance for health and social care staff was repeatedly updated, with input from the RCN and other stakeholders, including a PPE Clinical Oversight Group established by the Scottish Government. A dedicated phone number was also set up for staff to report problems with PPE distribution, following requests from the RCN for an additional mechanism for staff to raise concerns.

7. Do you agree that a mechanism (or mechanisms) should be found by which the cost of pandemic PPE is appropriately split between the organisations that are using that PPE?

Yes

No

No preference

7.1 What payment mechanism or mechanisms would be most appropriate in your view (preferably no more than 300 words)?

N/A