



# Second Personal Protective Equipment Survey of UK Nursing Staff - Summary

Use and availability during the COVID-19 pandemic





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# Introduction

The survey was open from Thursday 7 May through Monday 11 May 2020. The survey finished with 5,023 full responses.

The headline results are presented below, and where relevant, comparisons have been made with the previous survey (publication code 009 235) which was carried out 10-13 April. Due to the large difference in response rates, any use of comparisons should be used cautiously and with a clear caveat that the information is from very different sample sizes.

Some new questions were included in this survey, and these are indicated throughout.

The full data report will follow shortly and will be available at [www.rcn.org.uk/publications](http://www.rcn.org.uk/publications)

# Methodology

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) developed and distributed an online survey to all RCN members in April which explored respondent's experiences of personal and protective equipment (PPE) across all settings in health and social care. This is a repeat of the survey to assess the changing working environment for our members.

The surveys were framed around the UK-wide published guidance on the recommended use of personal protective equipment. We explored how far respondents working in specific settings had access to personal protective equipment and infection control and associated training needed to do their job safely; where PPE had been sourced; any issues experienced with the prescribed PPE; any pressure experienced to reuse single use PPE, or to treat patients without the correct PPE; and how far concerns had been raised or addressed.

The link to this survey was emailed to all RCN members and publicised through our social media platforms. The survey was open from Thursday 7 May until Monday 11 May 2020.

The majority of questions were closed quantitative with one supplementary open-text question. In total, 5,023 people responded to the survey.

## Summary of key findings

### Overall findings

- The situation has improved across the board in terms of access to standard and high-risk items of PPE since the last survey in April.
- Overall, 28% were very confident that their employer is doing enough to adequately protect them from COVID-19 in their place of work, and a further 40% were moderately confident. This question was not asked in the previous survey.
- However, more standard and high-risk PPE items are being donated, home-made or self-bought, especially eye/face protection compared to our previous survey.
- Over a third (34%) said they felt pressure to care for a patient with possible or confirmed COVID-19 without adequate protection. This has improved since the last survey (50% said they had).
- Respondents generally had access to enough general infection control supplies, and this had improved since the last survey. However, 32% did not have enough hand cream. More than 1 in 5 were concerned about the supply of disinfectant wipes for their next shift (22%), and a similar number had the same concerns about alcohol-based hand rub (21%).
- Over half (58%) of respondents had raised concerns about PPE and over a quarter (27%) of these were not addressed at all. However, there had been improvements in the concerns that had been addressed fully compared to the previous survey (27% vs 21%).
- The percentage of respondents who did not have any concerns (18%) has doubled since the last survey.
- We asked an additional question about why people with concerns did not raise them. The most common reason was because they did not believe any action would be taken (68%). 29% were fearful of speaking out, nearly a quarter (24%) were worried it would negatively impact on their career or training progression and 1 in 5 said there was insufficient protection and support for reporting.

### Staff working in non-high risk environments/standard PPE

- Almost a quarter (24%) of respondents are concerned about the supply of face masks for their next shift, with a further 11% saying there are already not enough for them to use.
- 1 in 5 respondents are concerned about the supply of eye/face protection, with a further 12% concerned there are not currently enough for them to use.
- Just under 40% (39%) have been asked to reuse single-use standard PPE items. There has been no improvement since the last survey.
- A third of respondents have not received training on what standard PPE to wear and when they should wear it, and over a third (35%) have not received any training on the donning, doffing and disposing of standard PPE. However, access to both types of training have improved since the last survey.
- We introduced a new question asking people if they experienced any issues with their standard PPE. Almost three quarters of respondents (73%) told us it increases their body temperature and made them sweat; over half (54%) told us it irritates/hurts their skin, ears, eyes, nose, mouth; over a third (38%) told us it doesn't fit properly and over a quarter (29%) said it didn't consider their specific individual needs.

### Staff working in high risk environments/AGP PPE

- Almost 1 in 5 respondents (19%) told us there were not enough respirator masks for them to use, with a further 35% concerned about the supply for their next shift.
- Nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents said there were not enough gowns for them to use, with a further 34% concerned about the supply for their next shift.
- 44% of respondents are still being asked to reuse single use equipment, although this has improved since the last survey (51%).
- Over 1 in 5 (23%) have not received training on what PPE to wear and when to wear it, and a quarter (26%) have not received training on donning, doffing and disposing of their PPE. However, access to both types of training have improved since the last survey.
- We introduced new questions asking respondents specifically about their filtering face piece respirators. 32% had not been adequately fit tested, and the most common reasons were due to there being too many different brands/types of mask to be able to fit test them all, or that their employer had not scheduled fit testing.
- We also asked people how long they could wear their filtering face piece respirator before it becomes uncomfortable. Over a quarter (27%) said it became uncomfortable in less than an hour, with a further 26% who could wear it comfortably for over an hour but less than two.
- We introduced a new question asking people within high risk environments if they experienced any issues with their standard PPE. 82% told us it increases their body temperature and made them sweat; nearly three quarters (73%) told us it irritate/hurts their skin, ears, eyes, nose, mouth; 41% told us it doesn't fit properly and 30% said it didn't consider their specific individual needs.

# About the respondents

## Workplace

### Country breakdown

- England: 78%
- Northern Ireland: 5%
- Scotland: 11%
- Wales: 6%

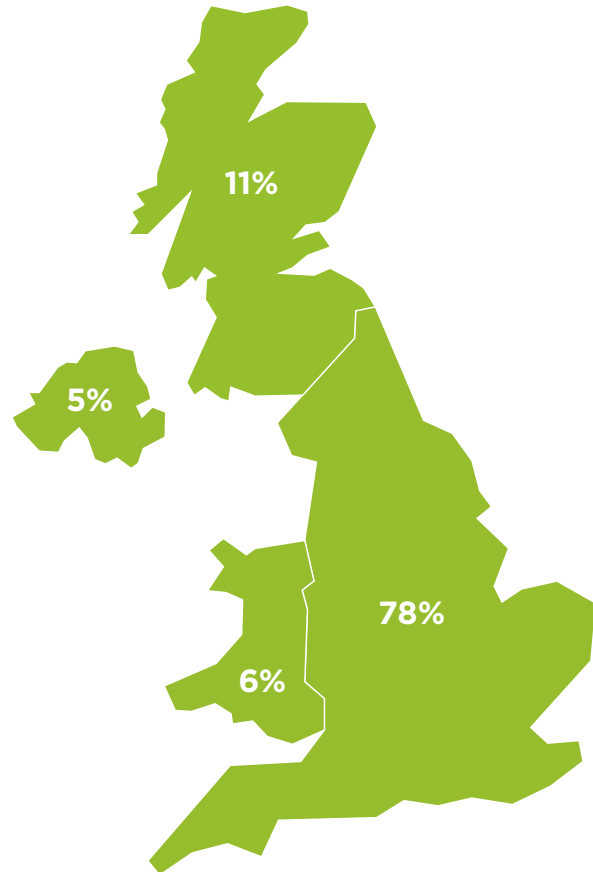
### 79.9% employed by the NHS

Employment type:

- Permanent: 87%
- Bank: 6%
- Agency: 4%
- Temporary: 3%

### Setting

- Hospital: 61%
- The community: 23%
- Care home: 11%
- Non-hospital urgent and emergency care, e.g. call centre, walk-in centre, home visits, etc: 1%
- Prison/police custody: 1%
- Other (please specify): 3%



## Demographics

### Ethnicity

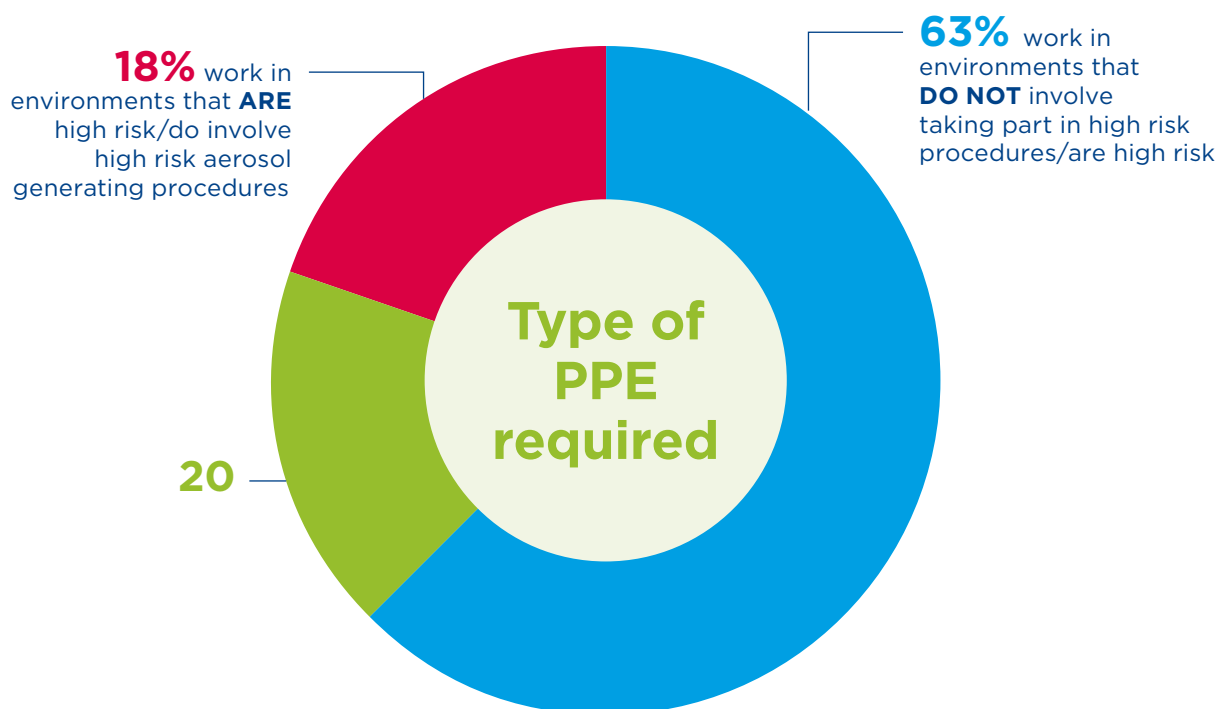
- 73% of respondents are of white British background (including English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish)
- 14% of respondents are of a BAME background
- 9% of respondents are of white Irish (3%) and white other (6%) backgrounds
- Finally, 4% of respondents answered 'other' and prefer not to say

### Disability

- 92% of respondents identify as not having a disability
- 6% of respondents identify as having a disability
- 2% preferred not to say

### Gender

- 90% identify as female
- 8% identify as male
- 0% identify as non-binary
- 2% preferred not to say
- 0% Other



# Access to standard PPE

**Do you have enough of the following standard personal protective equipment (PPE) items for the duration of your shift?**

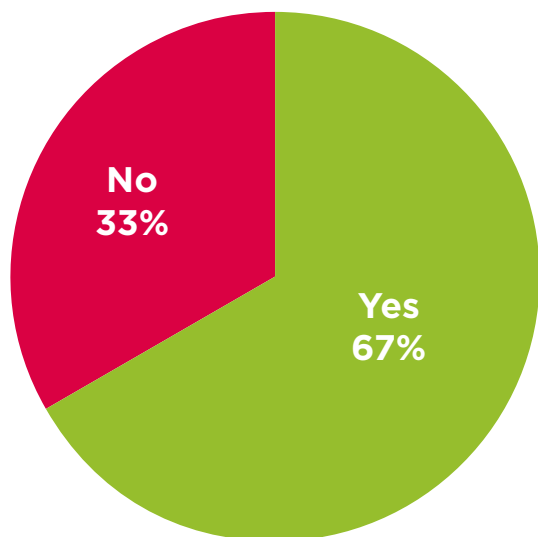
	I have enough to use in my workplace		I have enough at the moment but am concerned about the supply for my next shift		There is not enough for me to use		I don't know		Not needed	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Eye/face protection (This may be single or reusable face/eye protection/full face visor or goggles)	2,541	<b>62%</b>	820	<b>20%</b>	512	<b>12%</b>	141	<b>3%</b>	121	<b>3%</b>
Fluid-repellent surgical face mask (Type IIR)	2,291	<b>55%</b>	985	<b>24%</b>	471	<b>11%</b>	204	<b>5%</b>	184	<b>4%</b>
Disposable plastic apron	3,417	<b>83%</b>	552	<b>13%</b>	119	<b>3%</b>	36	<b>1%</b>	11	<b>0%</b>
Disposable gloves	3,540	<b>86%</b>	481	<b>12%</b>	82	<b>2%</b>	26	<b>1%</b>	6	<b>0%</b>

**Are you experiencing any of the following issues with your PPE?** *(New Question)*

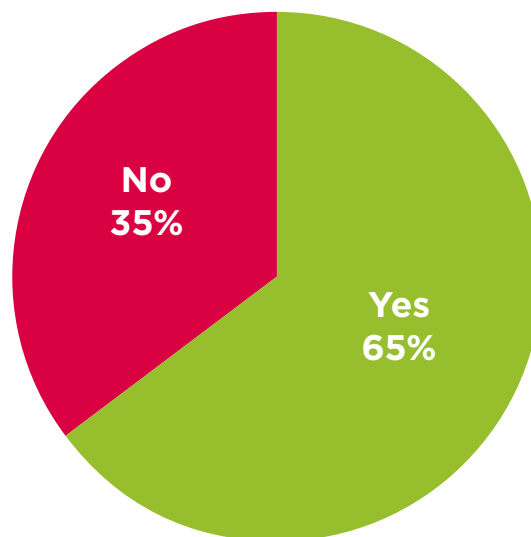
Increases my body temperature and makes me sweat	73%
Irritates or hurts my skin, ears, eyes, nose, mouth	54%
It does not fit (too short, too long, too loose, too tight)	38%
It does not consider my specific individual needs (e.g. having a disability, wearing glasses, having a beard, religious and cultural practices)	29%



**Have you received training on what PPE to wear and when you should wear it?**



**Have you received training on donning, doffing and disposing of standard PPE?**



**Pressure to reuse equipment**

During this COVID-19 pandemic, 39% of respondents have been asked to re-use single use equipment.

**Where did your standard PPE come from?**

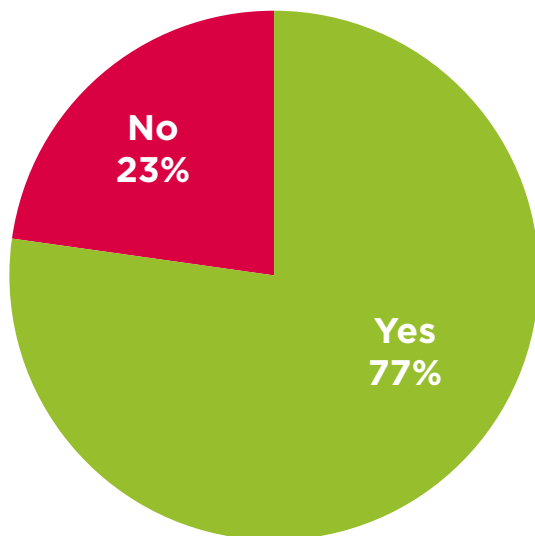
	Donated		Home-made		Provided by employer		Self-bought		I don't know	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Eye/face protection (This may be single or reusable face/eye protection/full face visor or goggles)	1,276	23%	306	6%	3,301	60%	332	6%	264	5%
Fluid-repellent surgical face mask (Type IIR)	304	7%	46	1%	3,662	81%	146	3%	372	8%
Disposable plastic apron	117	3%	12	0%	4,024	94%	26	1%	95	2%
Disposable gloves	122	3%	2	0%	4,045	94%	38	1%	83	2%

# Working in high-risk environments

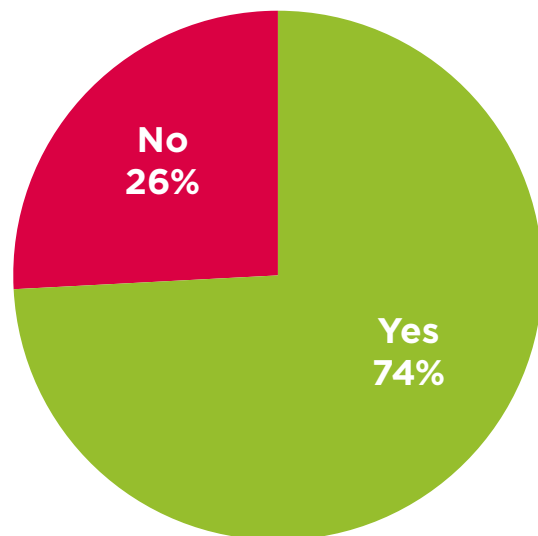
**Do you have enough of the following personal protective equipment (PPE) items, as recommended for supporting aerosol-generating procedures (AGPs) or other high-risk procedures, for the duration of your shift?**

	I have enough to use in my workplace		I have enough at the moment but am concerned about the supply for my next shift		There is not enough for me to use		I don't know		Not needed	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Eye/face protection (This may be single or reusable face/eye protection/full face visor or goggles)	1128	60%	504	27%	197	11%	46	2%	7	0%
Filtering face piece respirator (FFP3 or FFP2/N95)	744	40%	654	35%	360	19%	77	4%	47	3%
Disposable fluid-repellent coverall/gown	698	37%	636	34%	433	23%	75	4%	40	2%
Disposable gloves	1541	82%	291	16%	37	2%	13	1%	0	0%

**Have you received training on PPE (as recommended for supporting AGPs or other high-risk procedures) to wear and when you should wear it?**



**Have you received training on donning, doffing and disposing of PPE (as recommended for supporting AGPs or other high-risk procedures)?**



### Pressure to reuse equipment

During this COVID-19 pandemic, 44% of respondents have been asked to re-use single use equipment.

**Have you been adequately fit tested for the model(s) of filtering face piece respirator (FFP3 or FFP2/N95), you currently wear/have worn?** *(Reworded question to take into account having to be fit tested for different models)*

Yes	69%
No	32%

**Why has your mask not been fit tested?** *(New Question)*

Too many different brands/types of mask to fit test all	35%
I have not been scheduled to be fit tested by my employer	34%
I do not know why it hasn't happened	29%
My employer does not have sufficient fit testing equipment available	20%
There is no one trained to fit test	13%
I have been offered fit checking, but not fit testing	12%
I was not aware it had to be fit tested	7%

**How long can you wear your filtering face piece respirator (FFP3 or FFP2/N95) before it becomes uncomfortable?** *(New Question)*

Less than 1 hour	27%
1 hour, but less than 2 hours	26%
2 hours but less than 3 hours	22%
3 hours but less than 4 hours	15%
4 or more hours	9%

**Are you experiencing any of the following issues with your PPE?** *(New Question)*

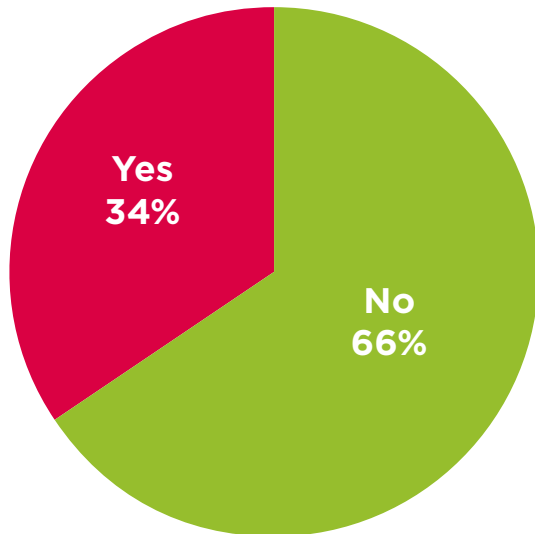
It does not fit (too short, too long, too loose, too tight)	41%
Irritates or hurts my skin, ears, eyes, nose, mouth	73%
Increases my body temperature and makes me sweat	82%
It does not consider my specific individual needs (e.g. having a disability, wearing glasses, having a beard, religious and cultural practices)	30%

**Where did protective equipment (PPE) items, as recommended for supporting aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) or other high-risk procedures, come from?**

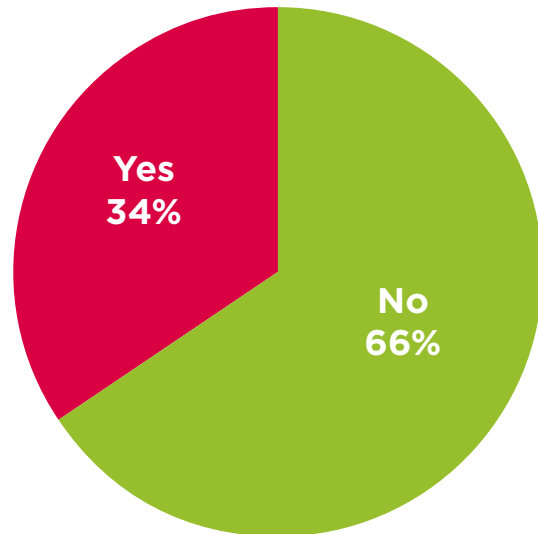
	Donated		Home-made		Provided by employer		Self-bought		I don't know	
Eye/face protection (This may be single or reusable face/eye protection/full face visor or goggles)	609	<b>24%</b>	131	<b>5%</b>	1520	<b>61%</b>	128	<b>5%</b>	113	<b>5%</b>
Filtering face piece respirator (e.g. FFP3 or FFP2/N95)	98	<b>5%</b>	10	<b>1%</b>	1719	<b>86%</b>	40	<b>2%</b>	139	<b>7%</b>
Disposable fluid-repellent coverall/gown	126	<b>6%</b>	16	<b>1%</b>	1691	<b>84%</b>	20	<b>1%</b>	154	<b>8%</b>
Disposable gloves	51	<b>3%</b>	5	<b>0%</b>	1814	<b>94%</b>	8	<b>0%</b>	61	<b>3%</b>

# Questions asked to all respondents

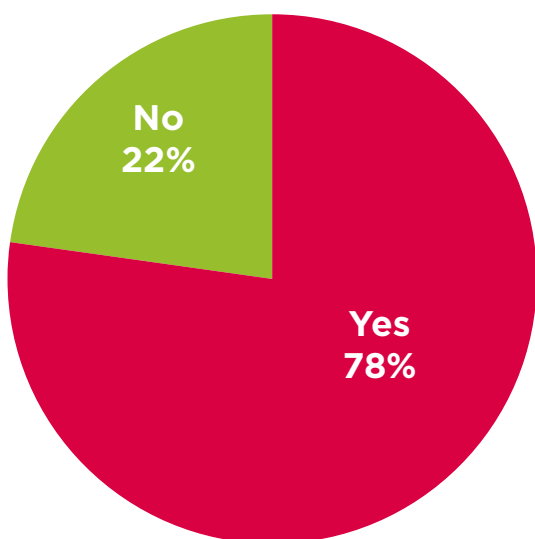
**Have you felt pressured to care for a patient with possible or confirmed COVID-19 without adequate protection, as outlined in the current PPE guidance?**



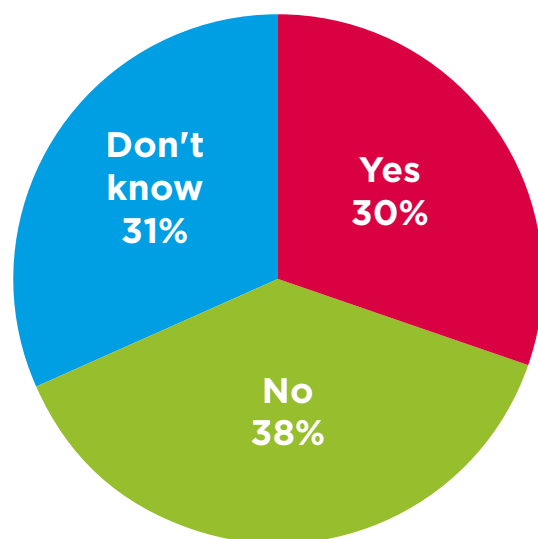
**During the COVID-19 pandemic, have you been supplied with damaged/easily damaged PPE (e.g. items that have holes, are scratched, tear easily etc)?** *(New Question)*



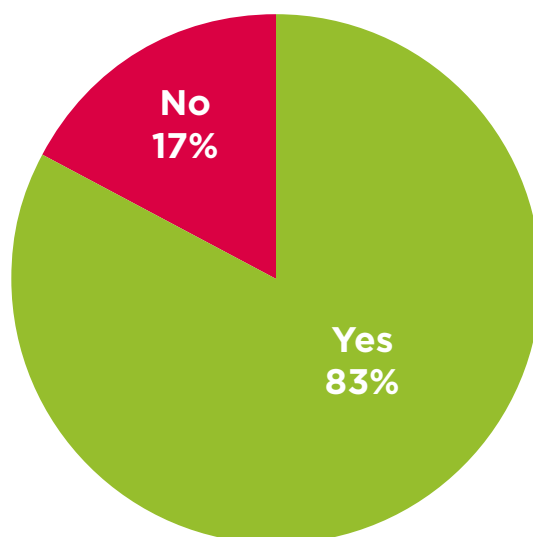
**If yes, did you have to use these items?** *(New Question)*



**During the COVID-19 pandemic, have you had to use PPE items which are past their expiry date?** *(New Question)*



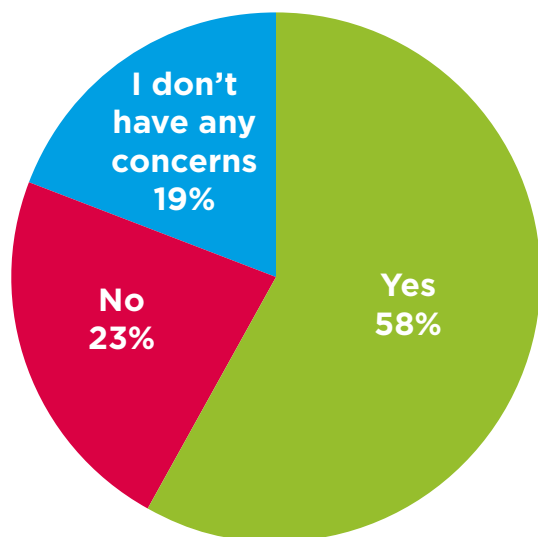
**Have you been given information and training to recognise dehydration, fatigue and exhaustion while wearing your required PPE?** *(New Question)*



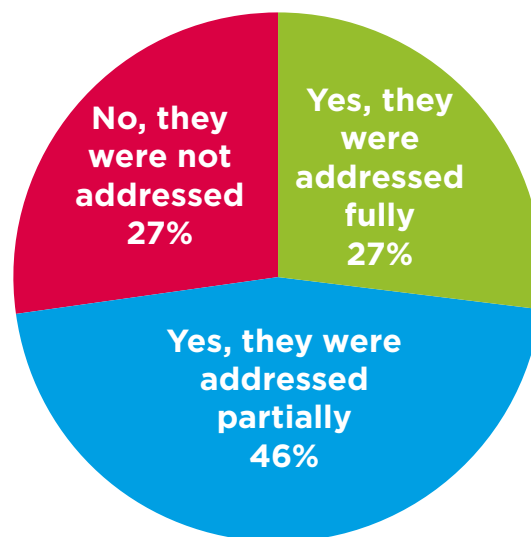
**Do you have access to the following general infection control supplies?**

	I have enough to use in my workplace		I have enough at the moment but am concerned about the supply for my next shift		There is not enough for me to use		I don't know		Not needed	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Alcohol based hand rub (ABHR)	3,469	69%	1,074	21%	418	8%	47	1%	15	0%
Hand wash/ soap	4,185	83%	610	12%	160	3%	43	1%	25	1%
Clinical waste disposal bag	4,114	82%	554	11%	188	4%	110	2%	57	1%
Detergent/ disinfectant	3,583	71%	633	13%	280	6%	376	8%	151	3%
Disinfectant wipes for equipment cleaning	3,158	63%	1,116	22%	611	12%	112	2%	26	1%
Hand creams	2,321	46%	532	11%	1,587	32%	468	9%	115	2%

**During the COVID-19 pandemic, have you raised any concerns you have had about personal protective equipment (PPE) to your employer?**



**If you raised concerns, were they addressed?**



**What method did you use to raise your concerns? Select all that apply**

Raised it verbally with my manager	91%
Raised it in writing with my manager	16%
Raised it formally with someone more senior (for example, nursing director, managing director, etc)	15%
Raised it with the RCN or other trade union workplace representative	5%
Filled in an incident form/near miss form or equivalent	5%
Raised it with RCN Direct or equivalent	2%

**If you had concerns, but did not raise them, why not? (New Question)**

Do not believe any action will be taken	68%
Fearful of speaking out	29%
Worried would negatively impact my career/ training progression	24%
Insufficient protection and support for reporting	21%
I don't know how to raise my concerns	8%
Asked, or instructed not to speak out	5%
Threatened with sanctions if I did speak out	2%

**Overall, how confident are you that your employer is doing enough to adequately protect you from coronavirus infection in your place of work? (New Question)**

Very confident	28%
Moderately confident	40%
Slightly confident	19%
Not confident at all	14%

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