

NATIONAL AMBULANCE SERVICE
INFECTIOUS PREVENTION & CONTROL GROUP (NASIPCG)
Working Safely within Ambulance Non-Clinical Settings April 2022

Following the national decision to stand down the winter respiratory guidance inc. SARS-CoV-2 this month, the Working Safely during SARS-CoV-2 guidance has also been reviewed to reflect the new changes to the main Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidance and a move to a new business as usual model for IPC.

Supporting the move to a new model of working whilst still accepting the risk of respiratory infections across the UK a new working safely guidance has now been published for the general working environment.

[Reducing the spread of respiratory infections, including SARS-COV-2, in the workplace - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reducing-the-spread-of-respiratory-infections-including-sars-cov-2-in-the-workplace) 1/4/22

The following information is for employers, workforce managers (of both paid staff and volunteers) and people who are managing a workplace or organisation. This information will help you to understand how to reduce the spread of respiratory infections such as SARS-COV-2 and flu in the workplace. This is especially important if there are people in the workplace whose immune system means they are at higher risk of serious illness from SARS-COV-2.

While there is no longer a requirement for all employers to explicitly consider SARS-COV-2 in their statutory health and safety risk assessments, it is important that as an organisation trusts continue to comply with your legal obligations relating to health and safety, employment and equality duties. This new document outlines the basic principles of how to reduce the spread of respiratory infections such as SARS-COV-2 and flu in the workplace.

Whilst SARS-CoV-2 cases are still on the increase, it is important to remember that IPC is something that should be part of everyday working practices and whilst most of the restrictions are now being lifted it is strongly recommended that areas of good IPC practice should remain in place for the safety of staff and patients.

Using this guidance and the best practice of the Working Safely within ambulance non-clinical settings some basic principles should be followed.

Local guidance should be in place and trusts should determine the level of mitigations required in the work areas based on local risk assessments.

Trusts should be able to rapidly re-instate any Covid-secure measures that are stood down at this stage in the event of increased sickness, outbreaks or a new wave of SARS-CoV-2.

Please note that devolved nations guidance may differ from the main government guidance.

Continuing action to support the reduction in Infectious diseases including SARS-COV-2 in the non-clinical setting:

Encourage and enable vaccination -Vaccinations are very effective at preventing serious illness from SARS-COV-2, flu and other diseases. Employers, in accordance with their existing legal obligations, may wish to consider how best to support and enable staff who wish to be vaccinated to get their vaccines when offered them. There is a [SARS-COV-2 vaccination guide](#) for employers which contains information on actions employers can take to enable staff vaccination. There is also guidance available on the [vaccines that are available through the NHS](#).

Let fresh air in - Increase ventilation by keeping doors and windows open where possible and running ventilation systems at all times. Bringing in fresh air to occupied spaces can help to reduce the concentration of respiratory particles, lowering the risk of airborne transmission of respiratory viruses.

Maintain a clean workplace - Revisit your cleaning schedules. Enhanced cleaning can be reduced in the non-clinical setting. However, staff must continue to wipe their workspaces prior to and after their shift as a minimum. Approved Cleaning wipes should be readily available for all staff to use furthermore, all staff and visitors should be regularly reminded to undertake effective hand hygiene using either hand sanitiser or to wash their hands frequently for at least 20 seconds. Enhanced cleaning of touch point surfaces may be re-instated based on trusts outbreak escalation procedures.

Review your risk assessments – whilst there may not be a requirement to undertake risk assessments as frequently, it is still important to review local risk assessments to ensure any reduction in mitigations do not increase the risk of transmission to its workforce or patients. Organisations should look to revisit their local risk assessment and ensure that they have plans in place which include the requirement to reinstate IPC measures in the event of further outbreaks. [Find out how to do a risk assessment](#).

To help decide which actions to undertake, organisations need to continue to carry out regular and appropriate risk assessments, similar to what would be undertaken for other health and safety related hazards.

This guidance sets out the **minimum requirements** to create a safe working environment and the control measures required following local risk assessment in the event of increased prevalence. It does not supersede any additional measures which are introduced through local or national restrictions. NB many of these measures represent recommended best practice for IPC under normal

circumstances and careful consideration should therefore be given before removing their requirement.

Employers should continue to comply with the requirements for cleaning, ventilation and welfare facilities in the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 or the Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015 to control occupational health and safety risks.

Employers have a duty to consult with their employees, or their representatives, on health and safety matters. The Health and Safety Executive has [guidance on how to keep people safe and healthy at work](#).

Face masks – are no longer mandated in non-clinical areas (non-patient areas), however in environments where outbreaks are identified and where the hierarchy of controls are deemed inadequate i.e., poor ventilation and where there are a larger concentration of people undertaking duties within workplace i.e. contact centres/ EOC, Organisations must continue to ensure that face masks are readily available for all staff and visitors to wear should this be deemed necessary.

Physical Distancing – Organisations should review risk assessments for non-clinical areas relating to physical distancing as this is no longer mandated.

Managing staff and LFD testing -staff should partake **in the recommended staff testing. Please see local trust Staff testing arrangements.**

SARS-CoV-2 has not gone away, and it is important that we keep this and any other respiratory infection out of the workplace. It is strongly recommended that certain measures such as, posters, alcohol gel, FRSMs and temperature check stations at entrances should remain in place to remind staff of the importance of good IPC practice and to reduce the risk of staff bringing in infections into the working environment.

In accordance with the latest testing guidance staff who are symptomatic of respiratory infections but who have a negative LFD can return to work as long as they are well enough and afebrile and their individual risk assessment allows them to do so. Please work within your local trust guidelines.

Five more things to be aware for people who work in or run offices, contact centres and similar indoor environments:

- **Agile Working** – The pandemic has shown the benefits of staff working from home and agile working within the office environment – learn from the pandemic and keep these changes in place where possible.

- **Keep workspaces apart.** Barriers and screens introduced during the pandemic can remain in place. This allows organisations to quickly escalate IPC measures where required.
- **Review staff space -whilst physical distancing can now be stopped** consider the volume of staff required area/ space while remaining comfortable. Be aware that staff may feel anxious about being in a room with lots of people – consider the numbers carefully based on the design, ventilation and space of the room/area. FRSMs must be available for all staff, volunteers, visitors to wear if they wish to do so or where a risk assessment deems it necessary.
- **Communicate and train.** All staff and visitors should be provided with or informed of the latest safety measures for that given environment including hand hygiene, cleaning of environment and any escalation of IPC measures. Do not underestimate the psychological impact that the pandemic may have had on staff in the workplace. Staff may be feeling anxious or may require additional information/ training or request further support as they transition to business continuity post pandemic recovery.
- **Keep visible prompts in place.** ‘Physical distance’ awareness signs are no longer mandated, however hand hygiene reminder posters should remain in place. Alcohol Based Hand Rub (ABHR) should be made available in all offices, and entrances.

Further information is available from the government website [Gov.UK](https://www.gov.uk) or your Trust IPC lead.