

## COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control - GP practices' responsibility

Government publishes Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidance for healthcare settings. The [latest update](#) published on 21 December 2021 advises general IPC measures and Transition Based Precautions (TBPs) for when “caring for a patient with a suspected or confirmed infectious agent”. These guidelines state “Employers should consider the specific conditions of each individual place of work and comply with all applicable legislation and regulations, including the [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#). This guidance does not supersede existing legislation or regulations across the UK”. Thus, practices have a responsibility to protect employees and patients to the best of their ability.

To ensure that practices comply with IPC guidance and Health and Safety and [COSHH legislation](#) we recommend that practices perform a risk assessment and implement measures to mitigate risks identified.

Risk assessment must include consideration of workplace, worker, and task. GPC England would advise practices to assess risk and apply mitigations appropriate to the risk of respiratory infection for the environments which your colleagues work in. More detailed advice for practices regarding risk assessment will soon be available soon from the BMA's Occupational Medicine Committee.

A possible risk assessment is in the table below.

The colour coding relates to level of risk

Very high risk	FFP3
High risk	FFP2
Medium risk	FRSM
Low risk	Face covering

The recommended Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) to prevent respiratory infections is a Filtering Face Piece 3 (FFP3) respirator. FFP3 respirators should be fit tested to ensure proper filtering and fit. However, FFP3 respirators and fit testing are not readily available. Health and Safety Executive has carried out a [review of FFP2 and FFP3](#) masks and has stated that “*when FFP3 respirators were not available, then FFP2 respirators could be used*”. A non-fit-tested FFP2 will confer higher protection than a Fluid Resistant Surgical Masks (FRSM). [Health and Safety Executive report](#), which states: “Live viruses could be detected in the air behind all surgical masks tested. By contrast, properly fitted respirators could provide at least a 100-fold reduction.”

Thus FFP2, FRSM, or face coverings **could** be used depending upon assessed risks.

If you assess that risk is high or very high you should request FFP3 with fit testing, or FFP2 masks from your local commissioner, a template letter to CCGs is attached.

Example risk assessment for practices, to be adapted to practice circumstances.

Worker and task	Workplace factors good	Workplace factors poor
Clinical workforce in a clinical contact e.g. Clinicians consulting and examining patients, doing BPs, ECGs, phlebotomy, or vaccinating in clinics	Vaccination clinic outdoors in well ventilated & well-spaced gazebo, CO2 <600ppm	Face-to-face consultation in small poorly ventilated room
Non-clinical workers in a patient facing role e.g. receptionists	Screen partition separating patient and staff with good well-maintained ventilation and vents on either side of the partition	No partition and ventilation inadequate / uncertain
Non-clinical workforce in a non-patient facing role eg secretaries, filing clerks	Large, well-spaced, even at maximum occupancy CO2 <800ppm	Small, poorly-spaced, at maximum occupancy CO2 >800ppm
Any workers interacting with each other – staff room, staff meetings etc	Large, well-spaced, even at maximum occupancy CO2 <800ppm	Small, poorly-spaced, at maximum occupancy CO2 >800ppm
Patients interacting with staff	Vaccination clinic outdoors in well ventilated & well-spaced gazebo, CO2 <600ppm	Face-to-face consultation in small poorly ventilated room
Patients in waiting areas	Large, well-spaced, even at maximum occupancy CO2 <800ppm	Small, poorly-spaced, at maximum occupancy CO2 >800ppm

Dear [insert name of CCG]

We have carried out a COVID-19 risk assessment of our practice environment and have identified that in some circumstances our workforce will be at high and very high risk of exposure to COVID-19. In these circumstances it is recommended that the at-risk individuals wear Filtering Face Piece 3 (FFP3) respirator which has been fit tested.

In lower risk situations we are using FFP2 or FRSM.

I am writing to you to request that you provide FFP3 respirators with fit testing, and FFP2 respirators, or agree to fund the cost of us procuring these.

Please respond as a matter of urgency so that we can best protect the clinical workforce.

Yours