NHS Staff Council Statement on Covid-19

The NHS Staff Council is supportive of the need for all NHS staff to be aware and vigilant of the risks of exposure to Covid-19 when patients present for NHS services or where suspected or confirmed cases are being cared for in the home or in an NHS facility.

The NHS Staff Council believes that good partnership working at local employer level between the relevant internal leads (e.g. infection prevention and control; HR; health and safety advisers, and staff who deal with resilience / incidents; occupational health and staff side) can maximise the effectiveness of any response to Covid-19.

At the time of writing, cases and suspected cases of Covid-19 are being managed in specialist units. This is likely to change as the situation evolves so it is important that organisations are fully prepared and engage their staff.

In developing local plans in response to the coronavirus outbreak, employers should consult and follow the latest guidance and advice issued by the Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England, Health Protection Scotland, Health Protection Wales, Health and Social Care Public Health agency in Northern Ireland, alongside advice from local infection prevention and control specialists

Key issues for consideration

- Putting effective communication channels in place to raise awareness of how Covid-19 is transmitted to all staff groups, including any contracted cleaning and facilities services. Communication should also reinforce what measures individuals can take to lower their risk, including hand hygiene, use of tissues and other public facing messages to reduce transmission.

- Ensuring staff and representatives, including those in ambulance services, primary care (including out of hours units) and Emergency Departments, are aware of local preparedness measures for the presentation, investigation, management and care of suspected or confirmed cases of Covid-19.

- Ensuring that relevant risks and Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) assessments have been reviewed to identify who may be at risk of harm, how this may arise and identifying what measures can be put in place to control the risks e.g. use of personal protective equipment, decontamination of the environment and waste disposal are contained in Public Health England (PHE) guidelines.

- Ensuring adequate supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) are available for use by staff providing care to suspected or confirmed cases of Covid-19. Ensuring that organisations have considered the use of powered

respirator protective hoods, where appropriate, and how issues with consumables availability be managed.

- Ensuring a programme of fit testing is in place for the use of FFP3 face masks. Where FFP3 does not fit the intended wearer, ensuring systems are in place to manage such staff.

- Ensuring staff, who may be caring for patients with suspected or confirmed cases of Covid-19, are trained in appropriate infection prevention measures - including the correct use of PPE e.g. how to put it on and take it off safely.

- Ensuring effective procedures are in place to allow staff and representatives to raise any concerns at the earliest opportunity in relation to equipment, policies and processes for managing Covid-19. Ensuring staff feel able to raise concerns without detriment, and that feedback is given to staff on the outcome. While the expectation is that staff should raise their concerns with their line managers / supervisors in the first instance, they should be aware of alternative routes for raising concerns e.g. the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian in England.

- Where staff are being moved from other clinical areas to support work on Covid-19, ensuring assessments are being made on the ability to continue to deliver safe and effective care in the services / areas affected. Ensuring steps are being taken to mitigate any safety risks resulting from staff moving to other areas and that these are recorded.

- Ensuring risks to staff who may be more vulnerable to Covid-19 e.g. those with suppressed immune systems, are identified and advice sought from occupational health regarding their deployment.

- Considering whether the staff that are caring for people with possible or confirmed Covid-19 are working to their existing shift patterns, and if not, whether their amended working arrangements been agreed with them. Ensuring that arrangements for accruing overtime payments / TOIL for any additional work have been agreed and confirmed with local trade unions.

- Ensuring staff working with suspected or confirmed cases of Covid-19 are monitored to ensure they can take adequate rest breaks during a shift and in between shifts to ensure they do not become fatigued. Fatigue can increase the risk of exposure, e.g. cross contamination when removing PPE when tired. Ensuring staff caring for possible or confirmed cases of Covid-19 are given details of what to do and who to contact should they develop symptoms.

- Ensuring systems are in place for keeping the details of staff involved in caring for patients with suspected or confirmed Covid-19, confidential.

- Where staff are suspected or confirmed to have contracted Covid-19, ensuring their personal details are treated as confidential, as they would be for any other patient. Ensuring staff are reminded of their duty to protect the confidentiality of staff who are being treated as inpatients.

- Ensuring PHE advice on staff travel is communicated widely. Where staff are required to self-isolate, clearly communicating pay arrangements during this period of absence. Where staff are being paid under contractual sick pay, any absence should be treated as an absence related to compliance with national infection control guidance and should not count towards any sickness absence policy triggers.

Further Information

The NHS Staff Council are aware that this is a rapidly evolving situation and relevant leads should check the following websites for the latest information**:**

- Department of Health and Social Care: Guidance for healthcare providers: healthcare workers who have travelled to China and other specified areas/countries, or are contacts of possible cases

- Department of Health and Social Care: Coronavirus: latest information and advice. This page includes the current situation in the UK and actions taken in the UK and abroad

- DHSC & Public Health England (PHE): Information and actions for the public

- PHE: Novel coronavirus: initial investigation of possible cases

- PHE: Health protection infectious diseases A-Z section under 'Wuhan novel coronavirus' (WN-CoV) for the most up to date information

- PHE: Novel coronavirus: what you need to know. Q&A blog updated by PHE

- Health and Social Care Public Health agency in NI (HSCNI): Health protection guidance

- Health Protection Scotland (HPS): Wuhan novel coronavirus

- HP Wales: response to coronavirus outbreak

Infection control advice

- PHE: Novel coronavirus: infection prevention and control

Home Isolation advice

- PHE: Guidance for NHS clinicians on home isolation of a patient whilst being tested for 2019-nCoV