

Coronavirus

Last update: 2 Dec 2022

Working in the NHS and COVID-19

Update: Tuesday 19 Jan

Posted on: 1 January 1970

Covid-19 is affecting all GMB members, none more so than those working in the NHS & Ambulance Service, including private contractors' and private ambulance services. Please be assured that GMB has been working to ensure you are protected throughout this unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic.

Advice and guidance continues to change so please check back here regularly to ensure you have the most up to date advice and guidance available.

General advice for GMB members is available on the GMB hub and covers a wide range of issues to help you understand what you need to know to be safe at work, including guidance on social distancing, self isolation, rights at work, school closures and personal protective equipment (PPE).

NHS employers guidance - England

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Guidance for NHS organisations has been issued by the Department of Health & Social Care, NHS England & NHS Improvement, Public Health England, Health Education England and NHS Employers. Despite this not being the usual negotiation process, trade unions on the NHS Staff Council Executive have been consulted and given the opportunity to comment and influence guidance.

This guidance applies to all NHS organisations in England and is intended to be an additional resource to supplement local organisational plans.

During the COVID-19 period, it has not been possible, due to the exceptional circumstances, to follow normal NHS Staff Council processes. Nevertheless, trade unions and employers on the NHS Staff Council Executive have continued to work at pace to input into the government's emergency response in producing guidance and updates on emerging positions.

[Read more](#)

The current guidance includes information on:

1. Returners to the workforce
2. Workforce supply and deployment
3. Enabling staff movement
4. Pre-employment checks and assurance
5. Life assurance scheme



6. Staff terms and conditions

7. Partnership working and facilities time

8. Health, safety and wellbeing

If you would like advice or guidance on terms and conditions that are specific to Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, please contact your local GMB Representative. Alternatively, you can email NHS@gmb.org.uk with your query.

Terms and conditions

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The latest guidance on terms and conditions issued by NHS Employers applies to all NHS organisations, outsourced services and NHS services commissioned from non-NHS organisations.

The aim of this guidance is to ensure that the operation of national terms and conditions reflect the unprecedented nature of Covid-19 and the reliance on NHS staff at this time.

The overriding principle is that staff should not feel forced to work if they become unwell and as much flexibility should be given as is possible to help staff maintain their health and wellbeing.

This guidance applies to NHS Organisations and Outsourced Services in England. It contains information on:



- Recording Covid-19 absences on ESR
- Self-Isolation
- Sickness Absences
- Other Absences
- Annual Leave
- Additional Work
- Returning to work in the NHS
- NHS Pension Scheme
- Working Hours and Working Time Regulations
- Reprioritising existing work
- Staff terms & conditions FAQs
- Quarantine & self-isolation on entering or returning to the UK.

Bank Workers

Employers have now issued further guidance regarding Bank Workers. It has been recognised that the impact of COVID-19 upon the NHS workforce has been widespread and varied.

Trade unions have expressed concerns that some bank staff have experienced a significant drop in earnings due to lack of shifts, but access to the Job Retention Scheme (Furlough) has not been an option.

In response, health trade unions asked the Department of Health and Social Care to agree that bank workers in England should be offered flexible substantive contracts to provide them with income security. Where this was not possible, bank workers should be placed on Covid special leave and receive full pay.

The request for Covid special leave and full pay was not agreed by the Department of Health and Social Care. However, employers and trade unions on the Staff Council Executive have developed joint guidance on flexible contracts for bank staff.



Employing organisations are encouraged to use the guidance to work in partnership with local staff sides to explore if bank staff, can be offered the option to move on to flexible employment contracts – which could provide workers within increased income security as well as access to NHS terms and conditions.

This guidance is dated 9th July and can be accessed at – <https://www.nhsemployers.org/engagement-and-networks/nhs-staff-council/joint-statements-and-papers>

All NHS Employers advice is published online and can be accessed here: <https://www.nhsemployers.org/covid19/staff-terms-and-conditions>

Other useful links

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- NHS England and NHS Improvement collates all advice to clinical staff, including safe systems of working including the of use PPE, online here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/>
- The full COVID-19 guidance collection is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

Covid-19 Testing & Vaccinations

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Testing

Regular weekly testing of asymptomatic should be happening in all NHS Trusts. Guidance can be accessed on the NHS Employers website at:

[Asymptomatic testing - NHS Employers](#)

Vaccination

It is with great relief that some of our elderly population, health and social care workers have now been vaccinated. It will take many months for people in the prioritised categories to be vaccinated but we hope to see the vaccination programme roll out speedily and efficiently over the coming months.

Health and social care workers have been identified as a priority group of workers to be vaccinated and we have already started to see NHS staff be vaccinated.

Trusts HRDs and local vaccination services are responsible for vaccinating NHS staff with frontline staff being prioritised. There should be a maximum of 12 weeks between the first and second doses and both should be from the same vaccine type.

GMB supports the Covid-19 vaccination programme and would encourage our members to have both the Flu and Covid-19 vaccination. However, this is not mandatory, and we understand that some of our members are not able to be vaccinated e.g. for health reasons; pregnancy; etc.

We therefore would expect that no member suffers a financial detriment as a result of not being vaccinated. If you have any concerns regarding this, please speak with your local GMB Representative.

Self-isolation, social distancing or shielding

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- **Self-isolation** – you should stay at home. More details can be accessed at:



<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

- **Social distancing** is reducing the social interaction between people to help prevent higher risk groups of contracting Covid-19.

The guidance on this has been withdrawn and replaced with Stay at Home National Lockdown Guidance which can be accessed at: [National lockdown: Stay at Home - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-lockdown-stay-at-home-guidance)

- **Shielding** is protecting people defined on medical grounds as being extremely vulnerable. This advice was updated on 28th October and more details can be accessed at - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

Updated advice has been issued on Shielding by NHS Employers, for staff categorised as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV), and can be accessed at - <https://www.nhsemployers.org/covid19/health-safety-and-wellbeing/supporting-staff-health-and-safety/supporting-our-most-vulnerable-people>

If people who are CEV, are not able to work from home, they should remain at home and still receive full and normal pay.

Following the Government's announcement to pause Shielding with effect from 1st August 2020, NHS Employers have published further guidance which provides advice for those who have been shielding themselves, as well as those who have been shielding due to living with someone who was advised to shield. This advice can be accessed at: <https://www.nhsemployers.org/covid19/staff-terms-and-conditions/staff-te...>

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How will I be affected by the Track and Trace Guidance?

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NHS staff will be expected to adhere to the requirements under the Governments Track and Trace Program.

This would be a requirement to self-isolate for 14 days if you are contacted by the Track and Trace team and informed you have come into contact with someone who has tested positive for Covid-19.

There will be exemptions for healthcare staff if the contact was in a working environment and you were wearing the appropriate PPE. The Government guidance states that the self-isolation period will be paid at SSP.

However, GMB expects that all NHS staff will be paid their full and normal pay for these period of absences in line with NHS Employers Special Covid Leave policies.

Can I use the NHS Covid-19 App?

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Posted on: 2 December 2022

Yes. NHS staff are encouraged to download and use the App. However, staff who are at work and wearing appropriate PPE are advised to turn off the App. They should remember to turn the App back on when they leave work. More details can be accessed at:

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/news/2020/10/nhs-covid-19-app-guidance-for-...>

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How will I be affected by Government Quarantine Restrictions if I am travelling abroad?

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NHS Staff Council have issued revised guidance in line with the Government's latest announcement of the closure of travel corridors and requirements for a negative Covid-19 test result before travel. This can be accessed at:

[COVID19-and-quarantine-revised-Jan-2021.pdf \(nhsemployers.org\)](#)

My Trust isn't following Government advice

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If you have concerns about how your employer is implementing advice in your workplace, please raise your concerns with your local GMB Representative.

Pregnant workers

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[Detailed information for pregnant women can be accessed here.](#)

As a precaution, you should follow government advice about social distancing; stay away from public places and avoid anyone who has symptoms suggestive of coronavirus. If you are in your third trimester (more than 28 weeks pregnant) you should be particularly attentive to social distancing and minimising contact with others.

I am pregnant and have been advised to social distance. What does this mean?

If you are less than 28 weeks pregnant (1st / 2nd Trimester) you can continue working in patient facing roles, providing that all necessary precautions are taken.

If you are more than 28 weeks pregnant (3rd Trimester) you can continue to work but avoid where possible any direct patient contact. Avoid where possible caring for patients suspected of, or who have been diagnosed with Covid-19. This should be done by risk assessment identification and the correct use of PPE.

Other health conditions

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People with underlying health conditions can continue to work but should avoid where possible patient facing roles, unless you have been medically advised to be shielded.

Redeployment should be considered into non patient facing roles and employers should be as flexible as possible to accommodate this. Risk assessments should be carried out for staff with underlying health conditions and people should be redeployed into a more suitable environment if possible. If this is not possible they will need to be sent home, on full pay.

Vulnerable family members

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I live with a vulnerable person, what should I do about attending work?

The GMB has been working with NHS Employers for more detailed guidance. This can be accessed at - <https://www.nhsemployers.org/covid19/staff-terms-and-conditions/staff-terms-and-conditions-faqs/pay#Shielding>

In brief, employers need to consider all options for working from home or a temporary voluntary move into alternative accommodation. The employer needs to be considerate of care arrangements and they are encouraged to use maximum flexibility to ensure that the needs of both staff and the service are met.

PPE – guidance from Public Health England

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Information on PPE can be accessed here on the GMB Hub: <https://www.gmb.org.uk/coronavirus/coronavirus-ppe-faqs>

All guidance from Public Health England can be accessed here. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

PPE guidance specific to the healthcare sector has recently been updated.

New recommendations for primary and community health care providers in England - www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/new-recommendations-for-primary-and-community-health-care-providers-in-england

New government recommendations for England NHS hospital trusts and private hospital providers - www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control



Further supplementary advice has been issued specifically for the ambulance service can be accessed here. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-ambulance-trusts/covid-19-guidance-for-ambulance-trusts>

Public Health England Amendment – Considerations for PPE Shortages – WITHDRAWN

Guidance was changed by Public Health England for situations where PPE is in short supply. GMB raised concerns with Public Health England at the time and were informed that this guidance is only for circumstances where there are extreme shortages of PPE only. This guidance has now been withdrawn due to their being sufficient levels of PPE in the country.

What is the GMB position on the new Public Health England PPE Guidance?

GMB has consistently raised our concerns with Public Health England and the Department of Health & Social Care regarding PPE guidance, supply and quality of stock issues. We secured some improvements to guidance and access to supplies at the start of the Pandemic, but our concerns remain.

Government has reassured us that there are sufficient supplies of PPE. However, this is based on the current Public Health England (PHE) guidance which we still do not agree offers sufficient protection. GMB contacted PHE and the Department of Health & Social Care again with our concerns on 14th December 2020. We will continue to campaign for the highest possible level of protection for our members.

In NHS Trusts there are still concerns that the necessary PPE is being held back and rationed, out of fears that it will run out in the higher risk areas. There are also concerns that full PPE is not provided to staff working on Covid wards and these staff are left with access only to the most basic of protection.

It is felt by many members in these areas that head covers would be a better form of protection. The lack of available PPE is also resulting in unequal access to PPE amongst NHS Trusts and even between departments within the same Trust.

In Ambulance services, the guidance allows workers to make their own risk assessments and determine the level of PPE they need. It should give all ambulance staff permission to access and use all the PPE they feel that they need and not what a manager thinks they need. However, we continue to receive reports of members being refused higher levels of PPE due to fears that supplies will run out. The current standards are:

Level 1: Standard infection control precautions.

Level 2: Gloves, apron, fluid repellent surgical mask (FFP2), eye protection.



Level 3: Gloves, Long sleeved gown, FFP3 Respirator, full face shield or visor.

GMB still believes that there are many parts of the guidance that are not strong enough to protect our members sufficiently.

We have concerns about the use of the term 'possible and confirmed cases'. GMBs advice to our members is that all patients should be suspected of having Covid and therefore risk assessments should be performed by the worker before dealing with the patient for them to determine what PPE they feel they need.

We also have concerns about the use of the term 'staff should not wear a higher level of PPE than is required'. GMB would always advise our members to level up in PPE and not level down, to ensure their protection.

We also have other concerns including the use of poor quality and inferior aprons, the guidance on cardiac arrests and other Aerosol Generating Procedure guidance. The GMB will be making representations to all the relevant bodies on all of these issues.

What is fit testing?

FFP3 Face Masks must only be used by staff who have been fit tested for the mask they are using. Staff must complete a fit check every time they are required to wear a new / different mask.

Powered respirator checks must be performed before each use, in accordance with the trust instructions, including a battery check.

Why is it important?

An inadequate fit can reduce the protection provided and lead to immediate or long-term ill-health or can even put the wearer's life in danger.

A fit test should be repeated whenever there is a change to the mask type, size, model or material or whenever there is a change to the circumstances of the wearer that could alter the fit, for example:

- Weight loss or gain.

- Substantial dental work.



- Any facial changes (scars, moles, effects of ageing etc) around the face seal area.
- Facial piercings.
- Introduction or change in other head-worn PPE.

What should you do if you fail the fit test?

The fit-tester should ask you to re-fit the face piece and repeat the fit-test. If a better fit is not obtained you may be asked to try on a different size or type of face piece and repeat the fit-test. You may also wear a respirator which would be provided by the employer.

You should not use a face piece that does not fit you properly. The fit-tester should inform your employer. Your employer should ensure that you are provided with a face piece that fits you properly.

There isn't any UK guidance that says 'what to do if you fail the tests.' There is just a requirement to keep testing.

GMB's position is that – you should not work frontline until you have a mask that is fitted properly. Alternative working options should be considered until this can be achieved, with no financial detriment and with the involvement of your trade union representative if required.

I am being given out of date PPE, is it safe to use?

GMB continues to challenge Government and Public Health England on this issue. We have concerns regarding the distribution and use of Out of Date Stock. To date, we have yet to receive satisfactory responses to our concerns and we continue to challenge these issues locally where they arise..

The Government state that: The NHS's stockpiled PPE is checked as part of the stock management process operated through the NHS Supply Chain. This means rotating stock to make sure that items which have been there the longest are issued first. Some products may appear to have out-of-date 'use by/expiration' dates or have re-labelled 'use by/expiration' dates. All products being issued should have passed stringent tests that demonstrate they are safe. The PPE is exposed to extreme conditions for prolonged periods, to see how the product deteriorates. All that are not up to standard should be destroyed and not distributed to trusts.



If you have concerns about PPE supplies at your workplace, please contact your local GMB Representative.

What is GMB's approach?

All key workers must have the right PPE to protect them. Not supplying PPE is illegal and unacceptable where the exposure risk is high. Where the right PPE is not available (due to lack of supply), lower levels of PPE are acceptable short term whilst new supplies are obtained. In emergency circumstances older PPE can be used, but not on an ongoing basis. If employers are not providing PPE, then we must challenge the employer immediately.

What is GMB doing?

The GMB has been lobbying Government and employers at the highest level, utilising the press and media where needed. We have been in contact with the Department of Health and Social Care, the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives and Public Health England to raise our concerns. Local GMB Officers and Representatives have been provided with PPE checklists and template letters to issue to employers to ascertain what the current situation is in your workplace.

As a result of GMB pressure on Government and Public Health England, the advice on PPE has been amended to reflect some of the concerns of our members. We will continue to engage with the Department of Health and Public Health England to continue raising concerns and in pursuit of further improvements.

What should I do if I have concerns about PPE use in my workplace?

GMB has launched the 'Get Me PPE Toolkit' to advise and guide you on this. You can access information and resources to help you raise your issues with formally with your employer. Please involve your local GMB Representative in any formal communications on health and safety concerns you have with your employer.

You can access the toolkit at - <https://www.gmb.org.uk/protect-protectors>

The GMB has a PPE survey and all members are encouraged to complete it.

[Access the toolkit](#)

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[Take GMB PPE Survey](#)



Ambulance guidance

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[Guidance for ambulance service trusts can be accessed here.](#)

Will I be paid section 2 unsocial hours if I have to take time off work?

One of the reasons that the GMB rejected the three year pay deal was due to the removal of unsocial hours enhancements when not at work. This issue was raised direct with NHS England and we asked that unsocial hours payments should continue to be paid to any staff having to take time off work due to Covid.

We successfully secured this agreement and the NHS employers guidance clearly states that *"It is essential for infection control purposes that staff members who are told to self-isolate, do so as quickly as possible. NHS England & NHS Improvement wrote to Chief Executives on 2 March 2020, stating staff should receive full pay whilst in self-isolation. This includes bank staff and sub-contractors, who have to be physically present at an NHS facility to carry out their duties."*

The guidance continues to state "Full pay must be interpreted as paying what the staff member would have otherwise earned if they were not in isolation, which would include any pay enhancements."

Industrial issues

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Formal meetings are going ahead. Do I have to attend? Management aren't attending so why do we have to?



GMB believes that all formal meetings should be postponed until the end of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Please speak direct to your local GMB Representative should you be invited to attend a formal meeting with your employer.

GMB will be keeping members up to date as and when new guidance and advice is issued. Please ensure that your membership details are up to date and that we have an email address and mobile phone contact details for you so we can continue to communicate at this time.

Please keep checking the GMB Hub for the latest advice.

Health & Safety Advice

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Please keep checking the GMB Hub for the latest advice.

[Visit the GMB advice hub](#)

Not a GMB member?

Join today

Do you want to be a GMB contact point during Covid-19 so that you can ensure all GMB members in your workplace are receiving the most up to date information? Email NHS@gmb.org.uk

