

# Trust 'draining away' over dangerous downgrade of PPE guidance



## Union demands answers over contradiction of global standards and previous advice

Trust in Health Secretary Matt Hancock is “draining away” after Public Health England downgraded the Government’s [advice on personal protective equipment](#).

The Government’s move, made last night without consultation with staff unions, followed a “[rapid evidence review](#)” conducted by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) at the behest of the Government’s



Chief Scientific Adviser.



ambulance

While Public Health England states its new advice is “aligned” with World Health Organisation (WHO) advice, **WHO guidance** on severe shortages states disposable laboratory coats and disposable impermeable aprons should not be used when performing support treatments.

A letter from Public Health England to the entire medical system on PPE sent on 28 March states “Consistent with the WHO guidelines, full sleeve gowns are recommended for high risk procedures (e.g. during AGPs) or where there is a risk of extensive splashing of blood and/or other body fluids.”

The HSE’s new “rapid evidence review” commissioned by the Government’s chief scientific adviser, appeared online with no publication date or explanation of the basis on which it was commissioned.



GMB has written to the Health Secretary with five urgent questions to establish ‘how, when, who, why & what’

1. How was the decision made to change the Public Health England guidance and to “compromise” on the Health & Safety Executive’s guidance made – and which factors – clinical and scientific – were taken into account?
2. When was the HSE’s “rapid evidence review” into personal protective equipment commissioned by the Government’s Chief Scientific Adviser and on what basis?
3. Who made the decision to downgrade the Public Health England guidance in apparent contradiction of WHO coronavirus guidance on support treatment, NHS Scotland guidance and the 2019 Cochrane Systematic Review recommendations?
4. Why, in light of the HSE’s “rapid evidence review” and WHO guidance indicating that non-sleeve aprons expose the arms and torso to exposure, have aprons now been indicated for use in cases even when there is risk of “splashes or sprays” and without due regard to work settings such as ambulances where wash and change facilities are unavailable?
5. What further assessment has been made of the availability of other essential personal protective equipment (PPE) such as eyewear and gloves including and how will the



Government proceed to publish rolling updates on the local and regional supplies of PPE referenced in the Public Health England guidance?



**Rachel Harrison, GMB National Officer said:**

“GMB raised critical protective equipment supply issues with the Government more than a month ago. It took until last Friday for Ministers’ PPE plan to be published, and it’s falling apart after just a week. It is key workers on the frontline who are paying the price for this litany of failure.

“It appears guidance is being hastily redrawn based on availability, not on evidence or best practice. This is downright dangerous territory and one that will amplify the concerns of NHS staff.

“The Health Secretary now has serious and urgent questions to answer. Trust is draining away. He must urgently explain how this apparently non-clinical decision was made to downgrade public health advice in apparent contravention of global standards and previous advice.

“GMB won’t tolerate a situation where our members are pushed onto the frontline without the basic kit they need to do their jobs safely. NHS and ambulance staff will now face unacceptable risks as a result of gross ministerial incompetence. We won’t let this go unchallenged and will now review the steps we need to take to protect our members”

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### Member requiring help?

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