

10th April 2020

Colleagues,

DSTL Scientific Guidance on the duration that PPE masks can be used

To assist forces and staff, and in support of NPCC guidance on the use of PPE by our officers and staff, DSTL were commissioned to provide scientific advice on the duration that masks could safely be used.

This DSTL guidance has also been reviewed by PHE and is supported by them. I am therefore now pleased to outline this advice below:

DSTL and PHE concur that the FFP1 mask (surgical IIR mask) can be used for approximately 8 hours. The mask must conform to agreed standards. PHE has highlighted the additional requirement to replace the FFP1 mask if it becomes damp. If the user believes the mask has been contaminated or become damp then the mask must be discarded in accordance with relevant disposal guidance and appropriate health and safety advice to protect the user.

PHE has highlighted that they agree with the latest NPCC PPE guidance (issued 8th April 2020) which specifically addresses the type and use of face masks to be worn.

DSTL's assessment is as follows:

These masks will all provide some protection against an aerosol challenge of COVID-19.

All of these masks are designed as single-use (usually interpreted as an 8hr shift) and the data on the suitability of re-use is not currently available (although data may emerge from other sources in the coming weeks). SME opinion is that given restrictions on PPE availability it may be possible to make a risk-based judgement. An FFP2 or FFP3 mask could be re-used for a period of 1 week if the following guidelines are followed:

- *The masks are issued to named personnel (i.e. never shared).*
- *The mask is used only for medium risk activities as outlined above.*
- *If the user suspects they may have been exposed to COVID-19, the mask should be replaced.*
- *Strict hygiene measures should be followed when putting on and removing the mask.*
- *The inside of the mask should never be touched.*
- *The mask should be allowed to dry between uses (i.e. between shifts).*
- *The mask should be changed if there any observable differences in fit (e.g. straps becoming loose, loss of shape to mask etc.)*

It is not recommended that FFP1 masks are reused.



This guidance should of course be combined with the existing guidance of regularly washing hands, particularly before and after removing masks.

This useful and timely scientific guidance from DSTL should provide much needed clarity and reassurance for our staff, and I would be grateful if you could ensure that this is shared with them at the earliest opportunity.

I will also be sharing this with staff associations for their awareness.

Regards,

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