

From the Chief Dental Officer  
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**8 March 2023**

**Via email only (for onward distribution)**  
To all General Dental Practitioners and teams

Dear Colleagues

**'Infection Prevention and Control measures for respiratory illness (including SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19)'**

The Public Health Agency have advised that the 'Infection Prevention and Control Measures for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) in Health and Care Settings' guidance published in May 2022 has been updated and should be withdrawn from use.

The updated guidance covers infection prevention and control measures to prevent transmission of respiratory illnesses (including SARS-CoV-2) in health and care settings and other settings where care is provided. The updated guidance can be found on the PHA website at:

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2023-03/IPC%20guidance%20for%20Respiratory%20Illnesses%2003.03.23.pdf>

I would urge you to read the guidance document fully. Significant areas applicable to the dental care setting include:

1. A return to the application of **standard** and **transmission-based precautions** when dealing with respiratory illnesses, in line with pre-pandemic IPC practices. Standard precautions are the set of activities designed to prevent the transmission of organisms between patients/staff and include the activities we normally carry out: handwashing, use of PPE, handling and disposal of waste and sharps, decontamination of equipment and environmental cleaning. Transmission based precautions are additional measures focused on the particular mode of transmission and are always in addition to standard precautions.
2. Hierarchy of controls - The hierarchy of controls can be used to help implement effective controls and reduce the spread of respiratory pathogens in health and

care, and non-healthcare settings. These are applied in order and are used to identify the appropriate controls. Safe systems of work outlined in the hierarchy of controls, including elimination, substitution, engineering, administrative controls and personal protective equipment (PPE)/ respiratory protective equipment (RPE), are an integral part of IPC measures. Risk assessments must be carried out in all areas by a competent person with the skills, knowledge and experience to be able to recognise the hazards associated with respiratory infectious agents. The dynamic risk assessment should include evaluation of the ventilation in the area, operational capacity, and prevalence of infection/new variants of concern in the local area.

3. **The recommendation for universal masking in all health and social care settings has been removed.** The use of facemasks (type II or IIR) in patient facing clinical areas for staff, patients and visitors (face coverings) and in non-clinical areas should be determined on a risk assessment basis.
4. Triaging and assessment of infection risk. Triaging within all healthcare facilities should continue and be undertaken to enable early recognition of patients with respiratory infectious agents such as influenza or COVID-19.

This guidance will remain under constant review. Should the epidemiological situation change, for example following the emergence of a variant of concern, this will be taken into consideration and the guidance updated.

**I would be very grateful if you could cascade this information throughout your dental practice team and ensure the guidance is implemented.**

Thank you and your teams most sincerely for the work you continue to deliver in dental services across Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely

*Caroline Lappin*

**Caroline Lappin**  
**Chief Dental Officer**

**Enc:** Infection Prevention and Control Measures for Respiratory illnesses.  
Updated 3 March 2023

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