

01/04/2020



National Ambulance IPC Lead

David Cunningham

Eastamb.NHS

Dear David

I am emailing you as the GMB London Ambulance Service NHS Trust Union Branch Secretary, to raise concerns directly to you on behalf of our members and colleagues. Also to support the London Ambulance Service Trust in protecting our staff to the absolute maximum during these worrying and frustrating times.

We are working in partnership with the Trust on the issue of PPE. I do understand that these are exceptional times and that we are all in this fight together, however, our members don't feel that the Government or PHE ( Public Health England ) are supporting our concerns. Specifically in relation to the issue of PPE, the quality of these products is extremely poor, and not suitable in a pre-hospital setting.

I'm fully aware that Dr Fenella Wrigley has been raising our, and the Trusts concerns with the Department Of Health And Social Care and PHE with little response.

The aprons that staff are being asked to use in the pre-hospital environment are inadequate and not fit for their purpose. They are of very poor quality and essentially do not do their job as they do not cover or protect staff. When worn, staffs arms, neck and majority of their uniform are exposed which in turn leaves them further at risk of contamination.

More worryingly, is that ambulance staff work in all environments and are subjective to the elements such as the wind, which catches these very poor quality aprons and leads the fastener to break and/or the apron flying in the face of the member of staff wearing the apron. This will attribute to the spread of the infection and more staff becoming unwell with symptoms of Covid-19. This is TOTALLY unacceptable to GMB London Ambulance Service Union and to the Trust.

The Covid-19 PHE Guidance of infection prevention and control in the healthcare setting states:-

*5.4.1 Disposable apron/gown Page 18 of 52*

*Disposable plastic aprons must be worn to protect staff uniform or clothes from contamination when providing direct patient care.*

GMB LAS Union believes, along with the Trust, that aprons in the pre-hospital environment do not “*protect staff uniform or clothes from contamination..*”, as laid out by the PHE. These aprons that have been issued completely contradict the above guidance.

It continues to say:-

*Fluid-resistanant gowns must be worn when a disposable plastic apron provides inadequate cover of staff uniform for the procedure/task being performed.*

This guidance firmly enforces that staff who work in the challenging environment and are subjected to the elements, aprons are not appropriate PPE.

GMB LAS Union, along with the Trust, believes that in the pre-hospital setting aprons being used in the open air is not only a risk to our members and staff, but will only spread the virus wider as theses aprons are unsuitable for the ambulance setting.

*The HSE ( Health and Safety Executive )*

*Evaluating the protection afforded by surgical masks against influenza bioaerosls RR619*

1.2 Respiratory equipment protective equipment, page 2, states:-

*Where PPE is employed as a control measure then it should be adequate for anticipated exposure levels and suitable for the task, for the environment and for the wearer.*

GMB LAS Union and our members on the front line who are now in this fight with COVID-19 agree that the aprons are not suitable for the task, or for the environment in which they are expected to use them to “protect” themselves.

Please, can I ask you as the National Ambulance IPC Lead to listen to our concerns, and the concerns of our staff and assist us to get the PHE Guidance updated. So Ambulance staff must wear a fluid-resistant gown, not the current aprons, in the pre hospital setting, to enable our staff to be better protected in this fight against Covid-19. There is no reason that our staff should not have the best PPE available afforded to them, especially in the current roles they have found themselves undertaking. If this doesn't happen now, members and staff of the London Ambulance

Service Trust will be further exposed to Covid-19 and we will see fatalities within our Trust. We, the GMB LAS Union, believe that in some cases, this is avoidable but only if we act now.

GMB LAS Union also have concerns that staff performing chest compressions do not at present, according to the guidance set out by PHE and the HSE, wear the FFP3 face. GMB LAS Union believes there is a risk to our members and staff that undertake this procedure as doing chest compressions compresses the lungs and air particles are expelled via the patients nose and mouth.

*Resuscitation Council UK FAQs published 20 March 2020*

Section 3 point D states

*CPR was defined as an AGP by PHE in previous publications. In the current Covid publication it is neither identified as causing, or not causing AGP( also it is not in the list of interventions which do not cause AGP)*

Staff require the upmost protection, especially when treating patients in cardiac arrest. In these unknowing times, staff will be unsure if the arrest is Covid related or not. We are asking for you to recommend the protection of the FFP3 mask when staff find that they must undertake chest compressions.

We would also ask for your consideration, that crews are allowed to wear the FFP3 mask when dealing with any suspected or confirmed covid-19 patients. Even though no AGPs may be undertaken, this will give our members and staff more confidence and better protection when dealing with our patients in the pre hospital setting.

GMB LAS Union is asking you, the National Ambulance IPC Lead, to support us. So we can in turn support our staff that are in the front line, fighting against this deadly virus, by recommending to the PHE the changes, as we have explained, to the current guidelines.

Thank you for your time.

Much appreciated

Clive Tombs

Emergency Medical Technician

GMB London Ambulance Service Union

Clive.Tombs@Lond-amb.nhs.uk