

## Face Masks – The experience reported by PDA members

The position of the PDA on the use of face masks and PPE was published in April and can be found [here](#).

The failure of Government to adequately prepare for a pandemic despite being forewarned by scientists and experts has led to significant shortages of PPE in several sectors placing frontline pharmacy at great risk.

However, members working in community pharmacy have also faced intimidating behaviour by employers when they have worn face masks or other PPE in order to protect themselves and thus their patients from the risk of acquiring COVID –19.

- *We have been told not to wear any PPE until there has been an actual case within the pharmacy which really defeats the point of having the PPE in the first place.*
- *We were told only to wear PPE when we have a confirmed case. This is actually too late.*
- *We were told it would scare customers and patients from the store.*
- *I wanted to wear a mask in the dispensary and they said that it was inappropriate and recommended that I remove it.*
- *Was told to take the mask off immediately as this was contradicting the advice of the government*
- *Employer does not appreciate pharmacy workers wearing any PPE in the Pharmacy.*

After all the debate of should we or shouldn't we wear face masks, the UK Government finally mandated that all staff in hospitals must wear face masks and all patients and visitors must wear a face covering.

At the press conference on 5 June 20, Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

*“So today we are setting out that all hospital visitors and outpatients will need to wear face coverings.*

*One of the things that we've learnt is that those in hospital, those who are working in hospital, are more likely to catch coronavirus, whether they work in a clinical setting or not.’*

This message has unfortunately come a little too late as one survey conducted by the PDA revealed alarming inconsistencies in the messages given by senior managers in hospitals to pharmacists.

This is a small selection of feedback we have received from members:

- *There is a huge discrepancy in PPE provided in hospitals around the UK. As a hospital pharmacist we should have face masks, eye protection and head cover when visiting wards. Yet I have been stopped by senior managers of the hospital directorate and told to 'stop wearing a mask in the corridors. It's only needed on the wards where you run the risk of going to see the patient and may be coughed on.' What about the fact that the virus spreads across corridors, door handles, wards? I have resorted to my own measures.*
- *The Managers and directors have their own agenda and have come up with the own guidelines around why you do not need PPE. "You only need a mask on a ward if you get coughed on by a patient, you don't need to wear a face mask in the corridors, as there is no risk here as you can social distance." This is a disease spread by contact. I openly challenged the chief executive and was met with the same answers and attitudes.*
- *All reception staff are getting infected and these are people who do not enter the wards. In other countries, YOU MUST wear a mask all the time. Why in the UK can we not wear masks all the time? I am not allowed to wear masks in the corridors or dispensary only in the wards. I feel unprotected.*

The Government has promised to update guidance on the use of face masks in primary care and other non-hospital settings. Workers across these other settings, including general practice, pharmacies and community services, social care should expect to receive the same level of protection.

Whilst this is a step in the right direction there must be a consistent approach in implementing this message that leaves no ambiguity for healthcare workers and the public.

This would reduce the risk of pharmacists facing a barrage of abuse by employers when they are protecting themselves and public.