

25 March 2020

Email: anthony.marsh@wmas.nhs.uk

Dear Mr Marsh

Re: Personal protective equipment (PPE)

I am writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives. We are sure that ambulance employers are focussed on doing all they can to protect the health, safety and welfare of their staff during these extremely challenging times. However, over the last week many of our members have been telling us they are very concerned about the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) available to them when they are dealing with patients suspected of having Covid-19.

We know this is not an ambulance specific issue - there are national and international pressures on PPE equipment - but we don't expect, even during this national emergency, that NHS staff should be at greater risk than the public generally.

Ambulance staff work in an uncontrolled environment which adds to the risks they face. We are sure that ambulance service Chief Executives understand their responsibilities under the Health at Safety at Work Act to carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments. These risk assessments will include the provision of Personal Protective Equipment for situations where the risks to health and safety cannot be adequately controlled in other ways.

However, UNISON does not believe that these messages are getting across to the frontline workers who are expected to treat and manage patients. So we are asking all ambulance service employers to:

- Carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments to keep staff safe
- Give staff access to those risk assessments to give them confidence and reassure them that everything is being done to keep them as safe as possible.
- Explain clearly to staff the scientific evidence employers are using when they make decisions about the provision and use of PPE.
- Make sure staff can access the correct PPE for the work they are doing.
- Provide suitable and effective training and instruction to staff on how to use PPE.
- Follow national and local infection control guidelines.
- Give staff clear instructions on what to do in the event of PPE not being available.
- Support staff to report problems with PPE and ensure recording and investigation of incidents

We will be sharing this letter with our ambulance branches and asking them to speak to their employers about how best to work in partnership to address these issues. We will continue to constructively raise issues of concern around the health, safety and welfare of our members and are always willing to work with employers to find ways to support staff in these difficult times.

Kind regards

Colm Porter

UNISON National Ambulance Officer