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Health Service Executive

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To: National Crisis Management Team
Area Crisis Management Teams
National Directors
Hospital Group CEOs
CHO Chief Officers
Director National Ambulance Service
Lead Clinical Directors

From: Dr. Colm Henry, CCO
Ms Anne O'Connor, Chief Operations Officer

UPDATE ON PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT [PPE] and COVID-19

Dear Colleagues

Further to the communication on Monday 13th April 2020 in relation to Personal Protective Equipment [PPE] we are writing to provide you with a further update.

Supply context

Previous correspondence set out the unprecedented challenge Ireland faces in sourcing PPE in the most competitive and highly volatile global market. You will all be aware from international news reports that Ireland is not alone in this challenge. The major supply line we have from China together with increased domestic production of certain elements of PPE is essential to ensure we have an adequate sustainable supply.

The budget allocated for PPE has increased from €15 million in 2019 to €210 million in 2020. Delivery of the Batch 1 order with a value of €31m and consisting of 33m pieces of PPE was completed last week. Delivery of the Batch 2 order commenced on the 18th April 2020 and this order has been considerably expanded [value €160m] to accelerate the supply of PPE into the country. This PPE stock is expected to arrive in Ireland incrementally over the next 10 weeks. While this additional stock will address some of the gap between demand and supply, challenges will remain. In addition to this primary line of supply, the HSE has secured supply arrangements with a number of other suppliers of PPE both within Ireland and internationally.

Expanding the provision of PPE

PPE is now being provided to an expanded range of settings and at increased levels in existing settings, in particular long term residential facilities which include mental health and disability services and nursing homes, including privately owned facilities, where there are confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19. Many of these settings serve populations who are the most vulnerable to the disease. In addition, PPE is also required to support the care of people in their own homes.

Challenges to providing PPE

While we have been successful in securing a significant channel for the supply of PPE, it remains a challenge to get this product into the country as rapidly as the demand is increasing. Increasing the size of the Batch 2 order from China, bringing forward delivery dates, together with expanding domestic production is expected to alleviate this in the medium term. We have also been provided with PPE from a range of other sources [e.g. donations, samples from other manufacturers etc].

New PPE products received by HSE Procurement are assessed for regulatory compliance by HSE Procurement and for clinical suitability by the Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control Division of HPSC before being released into the system. The clinical suitability assessment is usually carried out within 24 hours of product arriving in Ireland.

Current PPE limitations

PPE products that are facing the main supply challenges continue to be ***medical masks, gowns and coveralls, respirator masks and long cuff nitrile gloves.***

Medical masks along with gloves account for the greatest volume of PPE being requested. As a result of the NPHET recommendation dated the 21st April 2020 on expanded use of masks by healthcare workers, there will be considerable additional demand for this product. We have approximately 3.5 million masks in stock. A further significant order has been placed in China with delivery dates ***not confirmed*** as yet. An urgent exercise is being undertaken to quantify the impact of the NPHET decision and its implications for both demand and supply of masks. Based on the NPHET decision it has been decided to increase the daily distribution of surgical masks by 50% from Thursday 23rd April 2020. This will reduce the stock held in country more quickly than anticipated. Urgent discussions are underway with our suppliers in China to identify all possible options for significantly increasing the supply of masks to Ireland.

Discussions are also being held with other suppliers in an effort to secure additional supply lines including the manufacture of medical masks in Ireland. ***We have to stress however that though these discussions are happening, we cannot guarantee on-going supply until we have confirmation that these supply channels will be available to us and will provide for the level of demand anticipated.***

Gowns and Coveralls continue to be of serious concern and we are aware of pressures being felt across the health care system as a result. Some stock is arriving this week. We are expecting a large supply of coveralls to arrive later this week with large supplies of gowns expected from the beginning of May. Until stock lands in Ireland we cannot confirm availability.

Respirator masks also continue to be a concern. Domestic production of respirator masks has increased and this is expected to rise to 180k per week. This level of supply will still not meet current demand. Two sources of supply of the required FFP2 duckbill mask are currently being pursued with test samples scheduled to be with us on 25th April.

The use of respirator masks should be focussed solely on situations where they are strictly required, specifically aerosol generating procedures which are associated with an increased risk of infection. The use of respirator masks as default masks in other settings where they are not specifically required should be avoided.

Nitrile gloves have also been a challenge, particularly 28cm long cuff gloves. We currently have a reasonable stock level but this is a high demand item and we are supplementing 28cm gloves with 24cm nitrile gloves. Alternative supply lines have been identified and it is expected that a large quantity extended cuff nitrile gloves will be in stock during the first week of May.

Eye protection while challenging, the situation in relation to goggles and face shields has improved and these are being released to the system.

Managing the supply of available PPE

Many parts of our health service will have felt the reality of the supply constraints described above. We acknowledge the resourcefulness and commitment shown by many colleagues in finding ways to manage these constraints including accepting re-processing and re-use of certain items where there was no practical alternative. The appropriate use of PPE needs to remain a critical focus to ensure that this valuable resource is available for those situations where it is needed. The factors that govern the distribution of the current stock of PPE nationally are summarised as follows;

- i. The primary obligation and commitment is to protect our staff and patients.
- ii. The priority for supplying to environments caring for people with confirmed or suspected COVID and to critical care.
- iii. Hospital and community settings are treated equally and at the same level of priority.
- iv. PPE being sourced by HSE Procurement forms part of the national PPE stock and is supplied to all healthcare locations based on the assessed risk of exposure and the transmission of COVID-19, irrespective of whether they are public or private facilities.
- v. Where individual services have been successful in sourcing elements of their own PPE requirements, they have been asked to declare these so that allocations from the national stock can be provided to those settings most in need.
- vi. Clinically led algorithms are in use and under constant review in different settings to ensure PPE requirements are based on daily data in relation to the numbers of people with confirmed or suspected COVID and on infection prevention and control estimates regarding the type and quantities of PPE required in different care settings. These algorithms will better inform our work to match supply and demand across community and hospital settings. Where data may not be centrally collated to support these algorithms, alternative data sets are being actively considered such as the new COVID Care Tracker.
- vii. Where there are limited stocks in country at any given time, equality of distribution will apply based on available data as described in **vi.** above.
- viii. The HSE's distribution system has been supplemented through the engagement of a third party distribution company. This allows for approximately 470 daily deliveries to be made to priority locations all over Ireland.
- ix. The HSE is implementing the WHO March 2020 Guidelines recommending the use of PPE forecasts based on rational quantification models, to ensure the rationalisation of requested supplies and the use of a centralised request management approach to avoid duplication of stock.

Ethical Considerations for PPE Use by Health Care Workers in a Pandemic

The Department of Health has produced guidance on *Ethical Considerations for PPE Use by Health Care Workers in a Pandemic*. This guidance recognises that even with rational and appropriate use of PPE, there are likely to be times when PPE is in short supply. In such circumstances, health care workers may be faced with a situation where a Covid positive patient requires an intervention, and where HSE guidance indicates that use of PPE is necessary, but where there are inadequate stocks of PPE available. A copy of the Ethical Considerations guidance accompanies this letter for your information.

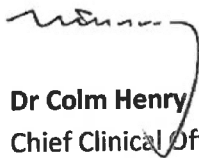
Infection prevention and control

Standard precautions including attention to hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette and environmental hygiene remain critical to minimise the risk to staff and patients of healthcare associated COVID-19 infection. Avoiding exposure to COVID-19, whenever possible, is safer for staff and patients than using PPE and also helps to economise on use of PPE. When exposure to COVID-19 is required, the appropriate use of PPE provides essential additional protection and the HSE is committed to doing everything in its power to ensure that PPE is available for those settings.

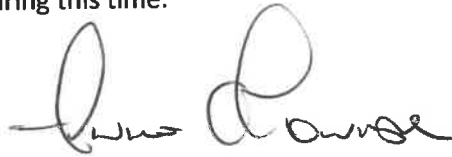
Conclusion

Over the past two weeks there have been a number of supply pressures for PPE. This has been added to by the requirement for PPE across a range of settings, not normally supplied by the HSE. To help alleviate these pressures the HSE is taking considerable action to increase both the volume and speed to supply from both international and domestic markets. We want to assure you that we will continue these efforts and are grateful for your commitment to patient care and your support for each other that have sustained services during this time.

Yours sincerely



Dr Colm Henry
Chief Clinical Officer



Ms Anne O'Connor
Chief Operations Officer

Attachment: *Ethical Considerations for PPE Use by Health Care Workers in a Pandemic*