

Dr Will Ponsonby
President, SOM
By email

Chief Executive

Sarah Albon

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21 April 2020

Dear Dr Ponsonby

I apologise for the delay in responding to your letter expressing your concerns over the protection of health care workers dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. You will appreciate that we are receiving exceptional levels of correspondence at the moment that means we are taking longer than normal to reply.

To ensure there is a continued supply of PPE and RPE of the quality and quantity required we have been working closely with the Department for Health and Social Care, as well as Public Health England, the NHS and other Government departments, to address supply chain issues impacting on availability. This has included advice on the infection prevention and control guidance that sets out the appropriate PPE and RPE for different procedures.

There is no change to expectations for providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) for protecting people at work, as set out in HSE guidance. We expect businesses to make the appropriate arrangements for sourcing PPE and RPE from their usual supplier or alternative suppliers, as necessary. We do of course remind business that PPE/RPE is the last line of protection, in addition to using other control measures where they can be effective.

I note SOM views on the application of RIDDOR and the investigation of reported incidents. At the outset we have focussed on effective exposure control and prevention of incidents. To this end we have been advising that businesses (including the NHS) check they are efficiently managing the provision and use of PPE and RPE. This is supported by FAQs on face fit testing addressing the effective use of RPE have been produced alongside posters to show correct practice. We will continue to work with the health care sector to ensure the correct levels of exposure control.

I trust this assures you that we are taking this matter very seriously and are doing everything necessary to ensure that health care workers have the vital protection they need while caring for patients with COVID-19.

Thank you for your offer of working with HSE on the safe and correct use of PPE and other issues. I recognise also your good working relationship with Andrew Curran and know that Andrew will contact you if necessary to call on that offer.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Albon', written in a cursive style.

Sarah Albon

Chief Executive

CC Dr Andrew Curran