



21st July 2020

Dear Colleague

Please see below for your information our latest updates:

Kent LMC Guidance for Practices in responding to patients requesting exemption from the wearing of face masks

Kent LMC Guidance for Practices in responding to patients requesting exemption from the wearing of face masks GPs are not able to provide individual risk assessments or letters for patients who feel they should be exempt from wearing a mask. The responsibility for issuing exemption whilst travelling lies with the transport provider. For example, Transport for London have produced a self-exemption certificate that patients can access online. Government advice on use of face coverings is found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers#face-coverings>

From July 24th people entering shops must wear a face covering. Shopping is not an essential activity and patients who believe they are unable to wear a mask should consider their need to shop. Patients that are vulnerable and unable to wear a mask may wish to consider using the volunteer service for support with their shopping. Details of local arrangements for support during the pandemic can be found here:

<https://www.kentlmc.org/attachments/downloadS3/1114017>

Failure to wear a mask in a shop is a criminal offence and enforcement is the responsibility of the Police. GPs are unable to issue certificates that permit patients to not comply with the law.

Children under 11, people with disabilities or with breathing difficulties are exempt. There is no definition of what a breathing difficulty is so it will rely on the discretion of the police officer enforcing the law and cannot be predetermined by a GP.

GP Trainees (message from NHSE)

NHSE/I have received a number of approaches from trainee GP's who are currently in posts across the South East and due to complete their CCT exams in August. These GP's are now seeking salaried roles but will need sponsorship as they are currently on student visas which are due to expire when their training is complete in August.

If there are practices within your areas who have vacancies but do not have a sponsorship licence my colleague Daniel Clarke (Daniel.Clarke11@nhs.net) will be happy to support them with the application process. Unfortunately, NHSE/I are no longer able to reimburse practices for application costs.

There are two price brackets for Tier 2 Visa sponsorship licence applications - as a guide, practices who have fewer than 50 employees the cost is £536 – the cost for larger practices is £1,476.

Can you let my colleague Daniel know (07702406773) if any of your practices are interested and he will support introductions etc. – the expectation following this is that practices would follow their usual recruitment processes.

Many Thanks

Sam Harris, Senior Primary Care Transformation Lead (Kent & Medway), NHS England and NHS Improvement – SE Region

GPC England meeting

GPC England met on 16 July and discussed the proactive strategy for responding to the next stages of COVID-19, following the recent publication of the [Trust GPs to lead](#) report, which sets out the GPC's vision for addressing the need for change in general practice following the pandemic. The committee heard from many members reflecting the significant concerns they had about rising workload pressures, in part related to changes to hospital out-patient and referral management, as well as plans to use NHS 111 to reduce attendance in Emergency Departments. This was also evident in the [last tracker survey](#), which clearly showed the significant increase in requests for practices to do additional activity without the necessary funding or workforce being made available to make this change sustainable. Richard Vautrey, Chair of the GPC, has therefore co-signed a [joint letter](#) with Rob Harwood, chair of the BMA consultants committee, to Professor Stephen Powis, NHS England Medical Director, on behalf of all primary and secondary care doctors, proposing and seeking solutions to the issues in workload and workflow across NHS sectors. It's imperative that NHS England and CCGs commission sustainable primary and community services to support patients and clinicians, particularly as more patients are being directed away from attending hospital settings. It's vital that these issues are solved as quickly as possible, not least as winter and any potential second wave of the pandemic approaches.

GPCE noted the updated [toolkit](#) for GPs, partners and practice managers to manage employment and contractual issues and service provision during the pandemic. The committee discussed on-going issues relating to PCSE and the transformation projects they are taking forwards. There was also an update on the support for a legal case being brought against NHS Property Services.

Please see attached the Executive and Policy groups update for July 2020.

GPC England guidance on arrangements for GP services for remainder of 2020/21 (England)

Last week NHSE/I released its [most recent letter](#) regarding arrangements for practices for the rest of 2020/21. The GPC have since updated its comprehensive [COVID-19: toolkit for GPs and GP practices](#) to reflect these new arrangements, including service provision, funding, and QOF. As they have done throughout the pandemic, practices can only work within their capacity and capability, and with the on-going constraints relating to social distancing, the use of PPE, risk assessments, workforce pressures and many other challenges, practices must be supported by CCGs and NHSE/I and not burdened with unrealistic expectations.

Face coverings

Following the Government's announcement [that face coverings will be mandatory for people visiting shops in England from 24 July](#), the BMA called for measures to be introduced immediately rather than waiting for 11 days and that the policy must be extended for all places where social distancing cannot be maintained.

The [seventh BMA tracker survey](#), published this week, showed that 86% of doctors surveyed in England and Wales said it should be mandatory to wear face masks in settings, where the public either cannot or will not social distance. Read the BMA statement [here](#)

The BMA have updated the [Reducing COVID-19 transmission and PPE section](#) of the GP practice toolkit, to include the new advice on face coverings. The Government guidance suggests there is no requirement for evidence for exemption, therefore **practices do not have to provide letters of support for those who fall under the list of exemptions, or to those who do not.**

Joint guidance for remote intimate clinical assessments

GPC England, NHSE/I, RCGP and a number of other relevant organisations have developed the attached joint guidance setting out the *key principles for intimate clinical assessments undertaken remotely in response to COVID-19*.

The pandemic has accelerated the use of online and video consultations in general practice and the guidance is aimed at clinicians who are consulting remotely and focuses on how to safely manage the receipt, storage and use of intimate images taken by patients for clinical purpose, which must be guided by the principle of the interests of the patient. The approach to video consulting, image sharing, and storage should be the same as it would be for face-to-face interactions.

The principles described in the guidance aim to support patients to access care in a way that meets their needs and to support clinicians to provide care in a way that is in the best interests of their patients, whilst protecting both from the risks associated with remote intimate assessments.

Shielding guidance for staff on returning to work (UK)

Shielding will be coming to an end in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland on 31 July, and 16 August in Wales, after which those who have been shielding will be able to return to work provided their place of work is 'COVID-19 safe.' The BMA has published guidance on [Making the NHS 'Covid-19 safe' and supporting return to work](#), setting out recommendations for safe return of staff:

- There needs to be clear guidance and protocols on how healthcare settings can be made safe for staff who have been shielding.
- Funding needed to ensure that practices are able to make the necessary adjustments
- Practices should be funded to cover the full pay of the staff that can't return to work as well as cover for their replacement.
- Every employer should undertake individual COVID-19 risk assessments which cover the basis of shielding properly and make a decision on return to work on a case-by-case basis.

- Employers should engage with staff on a plan for returning to work and make appropriate workplace adjustments, including access to adequate PPE.
- Employers should support staff to make informed personal decisions about returning to work, by providing honest and open information about risks and act on any concerns.

Read the [BMA guidance on Risk assessments](#). The [latest tracker survey](#) also showed that most GPs who are currently shielding do not feel safe returning to work.

BMJ Learning clinical guidance: COVID-19 in primary care

BMJ Learning has updated their clinical [e-learning module on managing COVID-19 in primary care](#). The module provides practical support to GPs on the following issues:

- When and how to consult remotely and face-to-face during the pandemic
- Key clinical features and complications of COVID-19 in primary care, and how to manage them
- How to prioritise ongoing clinical care in general practice during the pandemic
- The role of GPs in identifying and advising shielded patients
- The importance of working safely in primary care during the pandemic, including appropriate use of PPE, and consideration of the wellbeing of GPs and other practice staff.

Tax on COVID-19 testing by employers

The HMRC published guidance on 6 July which advised that employees would face a taxable benefit in kind when their employer pays for COVID-19 testing. The BMA raised concerns over this with the Department of Health and Social Care, and they have now advised that HMRC has removed the guidance. It is in the process of being updated to provide some clarity regarding NHS staff, with the expectation that they will not be subject to tax for COVID-19 testing.

NHS Confederation report on PCNs (England)

NHS Confederation has published a report about [Primary Care Networks – one year on](#), to mark the one-year anniversary of PCNs being established across England and assess their progress so far. The report sets out a national picture of variability but does describe how some networks are now delivering tangible benefits for the health of their populations and offering mutual support to their member practices.

BMA COVID-19 guidance

The GPC continues to regularly update its [toolkit for GPs and practices](#), which includes a large range of topics relating to COVID-19. There is also guidance on the following topics:

- [Model terms of engagement for a GP providing temporary COVID-19 services](#)
- [Terms and conditions for sessional GPs](#)
- [Guidance on risk assessments](#) which includes specific information for practices.

For further information, see the BMA's [COVID-19 Webpage](#) with all the latest guidance including links to the BMA's [COVID-19 ethical guidance](#) and [priorities for easing lockdown](#).

Kind regards
The Kent Local Medical Committee