

# Uniform and workwear guidance

## Context

Regular washing and changing of clothes is an effective method for reducing the spread of infection and maintaining public and patient confidence in health care workers and their employing organisations. This is particularly important at this time of a pandemic of SARS2COV (coronavirus).

Health care workers in all settings are highly likely to come into regular contact with those who have the virus and need to clearly understand the employer and individual responsibilities for uniform and workwear.

This guidance sets out information on issues related to selecting, wearing and decontaminating uniforms or clothing worn when caring for people during the SARS2CoV (coronavirus) pandemic. It can be applied to all settings in which health care takes place, and for any clothing worn when undertaking care activities.

## Uniform and workwear

If you are required to wear a uniform for your role it must be smart, safe and practical. The nursing image, especially during this pandemic, significantly contributes to the way nursing and midwifery is regarded professionally and publicly, supporting trust and public confidence. The uniform must also allow mobility and comfort whilst being able to withstand decontamination (laundering).

All clothing worn by all staff working in health and social care has the potential to become contaminated via environmental, individual or patient micro-organisms. Staff clothing must be fit for purpose and able to withstand

laundering in water temperatures of at least 60°C and tumble drying.

Your employer should have uniform and workwear policies<sup>1</sup> in place for all employed, voluntary or agency staff and this will identify what type of uniform is needed (if any), that the uniform is fit for purpose and risk assessments on type of uniform worn or decisions as to whether a uniform is needed. The policy should detail how you comply with essential good practices with regard to uniforms and support good hand hygiene (bare below the elbow). Employers must also ensure the protection of staff and decide whether wearing of uniforms inside or outside of the workplace is a risk eg, increased risk of violence or harassment.

All staff must be supplied with sufficient uniforms to allow them to wear a clean complete uniform every day (NHS England, 2020, Welsh Assembly, 2010) and have a spare uniform should items become contaminated in the course of work. This may mean your employer will need to provide additional uniforms to you for the duration of the SARS2CoV (coronavirus) pandemic, or allow you to wear alternative resources eg, scrubs, as an interim solution. Nursing staff working in full PPE, including gowns and FFP3 masks are likely to sweat more, particularly during warmer weather. For comfort and to reduce the risk of skin problems or heat stress, there should be an adequate supply of uniforms or scrubs to change into during a shift.

For those health care workers who are obliged to purchase their own uniforms, the RCN is clear that health care workers must not make, purchase or accept any individual offers of hand made donations of uniform or workwear directly from the public. Clothing fabric used for health care workers must withstand laundering

(including washing and tumble drying) at the correct temperature required for thermal disinfection for infection control and comply with employers' requirements. To ensure reliable and effective protection against infection, and ensure their uniform is fit for purpose, health care uniforms must meet certain standards that not all donated or homemade clothing will meet. This includes scrubs.

For those health care workers who do not wear a uniform (for example some community staff, health visitors, etc.) it is recommended they separate their own clothing into items worn for work and items worn outside of work. As with all community workers, avoid activities to and from work such as shopping. Clothes can then be easily separated out for washing into potentially contaminated workwear, and clothes worn at home for normal laundering.

## Changing facilities

If you are a location-based worker (for example those who work in a hospital, hospice, GP, surgery, clinic, etc.) you must travel to work in your own clothes and take a uniform in a plastic bag to change into once on site.

Under the Workplace (health, safety and welfare) Regulations (Health and Safety Executive 1992), where the work requires employees to change into and wear specialist clothing, such as a uniform, then employers must provide adequate changing facilities.

Once the workday is complete, your uniform must be put back in a plastic bag and taken home. If possible, wash your uniform immediately and dispose of the plastic bag. If you have additional soiled uniforms in plastic bags, they can all be washed together in the same wash (see section on laundering uniforms below).

If you are a mobile worker travelling from location to location in the community by car (for example community nurses, community HCWs, midwives, etc.) you will have to wear the same uniform or clothes throughout your **work day**. If **necessary** you must be protected by the correct PPE for the setting and **context**

you are working in. Public perception is that wearing uniforms in the community may pose an infection control risk; this risk is extremely low provided uniforms are laundered correctly and PPE is worn when caring for higher risk individuals (Public Health England, 2020). Using the RCN guidance on PPE Are you Safe? will assist in escalating concerns and subsequent RCN Refusal to Treat guidance is to be followed if the PPE provided is not adequate.

Shopping or non-work activities should be avoided whilst in uniform/workwear in the community. If this is unavoidable due to shopping restrictions in the pandemic, cover the uniform as much as possible with a coat.

## Laundering uniforms

National recommendations state that uniforms should be laundered on site by health care laundry services (Public Health England, 2020). The RCN expects all employers at this time to consider all options around laundering uniforms for their employees to reduce the reliance on home laundering. All such arrangements must comply with infection prevention standards. Where the facility exists, you should have access to this facility to launder your uniforms or workwear.

If employer laundering facilities are not available, national recommendations are that home laundering will easily and safely remove any infectious micro-organisms if the laundry guidance is followed (Lakdawala N, et al., 2011). This includes SARS2CoV (coronavirus).

If laundered at home, uniforms or workwear should be laundered:

- separately from **other** household linen
- in a load not more than half the machine capacity
- at the maximum temperature the fabric can tolerate.

It should then be **ironed** or tumbled dried (uniforms or workwear can be tumble dried with other household laundry as correct washing will remove any infectious micro-organisms on the uniform).

## National uniform guidance

NHS England and NHS Improvement (2020)  
**Uniforms and workwear: guidance for NHS employers**

Welsh Assembly Government (2010)  
**All Wales NHS Dress Code: Free to Lead, Free to Care**

The Scottish Government (2018)  
**National Uniform Policy, Dress Code, and Laundering Policy**

## References

Health and Safety Executive (1992)  
*Workplace (health, safety and welfare) Regulations (1992)*. London: HSE. Available at: [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l24.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l24.htm) (accessed 20 April 2020)

Lakdawala N, Pham J, Shah M, Holton J (2011) Effectiveness of low-temperature domestic laundry on the decontamination of healthcare workers' uniforms. *Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology* 32(11): 1103-1108 (6p)

NHS England and NHS Improvement (2020)  
*Uniforms and Workwear: Guidance for NHS Employers*. London: NHSE. Available at: [www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/uniforms-and-workwear](http://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/uniforms-and-workwear) (accessed 20 April 2020)

Public Health England (2020) *Reducing the Risk of Transmission of COVID-19 in the Hospital Setting*. London: PHE. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/reducing-the-risk-of-transmission-of-covid-19-in-the-hospital-setting#staff-uniform](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/reducing-the-risk-of-transmission-of-covid-19-in-the-hospital-setting#staff-uniform) (accessed 20 April 2020)

Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *All Wales NHS Dress Code: Free to Lead, Free to Care*. Cardiff: WAG. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/all-wales-nhs-dress-code-free-to-lead-free-to-care.pdf> (accessed 20 April 2020)

<sup>1</sup> Health and Social Care Act (2015)