

NHS Patients, Staff and Visitors Must Continue To Wear Face Coverings in Healthcare Settings

England's Chief Nurse has today reminded the public that everyone accessing or visiting healthcare settings must continue to wear a face covering and follow social distancing rules.

Covid restrictions will end in many settings in England from Monday.

However, Public Health England's infection prevention control guidelines and hospital visiting guidance are set to remain in place for all staff and visitors.

That means NHS visitor guidance will stay in place across all health services including hospitals, GP practices, dental practices, optometrists and pharmacies to ensure patients and staff are protected.

Staff, patients and visitors will also be expected to continue to follow social distancing rules when visiting any care setting as well as using face coverings, mask and other personal protection equipment.

The NHS will continue to support staff in ensuring that the guidance is followed in all healthcare settings.

Chief Nursing Officer for England, Ruth May said: "Face coverings and social distancing measures will remain in place across healthcare settings so that the most vulnerable people can continue to safely attend hospital, their GP surgery, pharmacy or any other healthcare settings for advice, care and treatment.

"And it is important for the public to continue to play their part when visiting NHS and care settings to help protect our staff and patients, particularly those who may be more vulnerable to infections.

"As restrictions are lifted in many places on Monday everyone has a part to play in helping to control the Covid by getting vaccinated and acting responsibly.

"It is vital that in healthcare settings, we do all we can to reduce the risk of infection for those working in our services and those who need our care."

Health Minister Jo Churchill said: "Face coverings have played an important role in healthcare settings, helping protect vulnerable patients, staff and visitors by limiting the spread of this deadly disease and this guidance remains in place.

"We expect patients, visitors and NHS staff to continue using face coverings and maintain social distancing in all healthcare settings as we cautiously lift restrictions on Monday.

"I urge everyone to play their part and think of those more vulnerable than you when visiting your local hospital or GP surgery."

Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard, Chair of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges said: "It is absolutely right that basic infection prevention and control measures stay in place in healthcare settings. Simple steps such as wearing a face mask and keeping a safe distance away from others are a minor inconvenience but could have a profound positive impact when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable and I strongly support the chief nurse with this clear reminder."

Jude Diggins, Interim RCN Director of Nursing, Policy and Public Affairs said: "The recent increase in the number of COVID-19 cases shows that we have some way to go before being free from the pandemic. The public understand the importance of face masks, social distancing and vigilant handwashing in all health and care settings. These must continue in order to protect patients and nursing staff thus helping to ensure the NHS has the capacity to treat everyone who needs it if pressures keep increasing."

Eddie Crouch, Chair of the British Dental Association said: "These guidelines are in place to protect patients and staff. When visiting a dentist face coverings, social distancing and hand washing remain fundamentals not optional extras. Wider changes that take place on Monday will have no impact on how the public should approach accessing our services."

Thorrún Govind, Chair of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society in England said: "Pharmacists and their teams are working really hard to support patient care and the public can do its bit to help keep people safe. While some pharmacies are in retail environments, they're still a healthcare setting and have been relied upon to support and protect the public throughout the pandemic. I'd urge everyone entering a pharmacy or any healthcare setting to wear a mask and maintain social distancing to reduce the risk from COVID-19 to both patients and staff."

UNISON head of health Sara Gorton said: "Although restrictions are easing, NHS staff are under pressure trying to clear the long wait lists that have built up during the pandemic. At the same time, Coronavirus cases are rising rapidly and many people remain vulnerable. It's vital that staff know they will be kept safe and the public are clear that measures like social distancing and mask wearing will still be needed to stop the spread in healthcare settings."