

Facemasks and FFP3 Respirators Q&A

I have received a stockpile of Cardinal Type II Facemasks, whereas the infection control guidance recommends use of Type IIR “Fluid Repellent”, please can you advise if I can continue to use this type?

We have been asked by some PCTs about the appropriate use of Type II “Cardinal” brand surgical masks. This is because existing infection control guidance recommends the use of fluid repellent surgical masks, which are the equivalent of ‘Type IR’ or ‘Type IIR’ (the ‘R’ denoting “repellent”).

In consultation with DH infection control leads, Health Protection Scotland (Scotland have distributed the same product as part of their recent swine flu response); and the Health Protection Agency we can now offer some clarification.

Whilst the effectiveness of the various types of surgical facemasks is not well established, they are advocated to minimise the risk of transmission by large droplets from symptomatic persons who are being assessed for influenza A(H1N1). They also act as a physical barrier minimising hand to mouth /nose transfer of virus particles on hands acquired through contact with infected secretions or contaminated fomites.

Our experts recommend that the Type II surgical masks can still assist in minimising the transmission of infected droplets/secretions and should continue to be used for the time being. However, as they are less robust than the Type IIR masks, they should only be used for short interactions with patients, for example assessment procedures and taking nose or throat swabs.

DH is stockpiling 226million Type IIR facemasks over the next few months. We will let you know when to expect deliveries. Once deliveries are made we recommend that you adopt them for regular use and that the Type II facemasks are stored for contingencies or when stocks run very low, or that they be used for training purposes to minimise confusion among staff.

I have received outdated stock with expiry date just gone or soon due to go out of date for both Facemasks and FFP3s – what should I do with them?

Some deliveries of facemasks have been made which are just past or soon to reach their expiry date. DH has sought advice from the HPA and Infection Control colleagues on their usability.

Recent studies suggest that most FFP2 respirators stored in warehouse and laboratory conditions are likely to maintain their filtration capacity for up to 10 years. Whilst there is not any specific work of this kind in relation to FFP3 respirators, it would seem reasonable to assume that respirators past their

use by date would offer some degree of protection. HSE comments that the filtering efficacy of respirators is unlikely to degrade much even if materials are two years out of date, but a visual check should be made for structural integrity. The HSE have also noted that for hospitals who have acquired local stockpiles of masks, which are out-of date they should not be destroyed. Instead, they could be pressed into service once in-date stocks have been exhausted, provided they have been stored appropriately. The HPA support this view.

The DH is stockpiling 34million FFP3 respirators over the forthcoming months and a distribution profile will be communicated to NHS colleagues outlining when they can expect their new deliveries. Once deliveries are made it is recommended that NHS colleagues replace any expired FFP3s with the new FFP3 respirators. It is then advised that the FFP3 respirators are stored for contingency purposes should stocks run very low (as advised by the HSE).

To review the HPA paper please go to:

http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1242371195983

All FFP3s I have received are valved respirators, on the delivery note it states that a proportion should be un-valved, is my delivery correct?

Yes, the delivery is correct all the FFP3s you receive should be valved FFP3s. There was an unusual supplier code for a small part of the stock which was mistakenly picked up as 'un-valved', but all the FFP3s sent out were valved only.

When can I expect to receive the new facemask/FFP3 respirators stock?

The DH are stockpiling 226million Type IIR "Fluid Repellent" facemasks and 34million FFP3 respirators over the forthcoming months. We are currently working out the stockpiling patterns with the manufacturers, once we have confirmation on timings we can begin looking at distribution delivery timetables and will communicate details through SHA Flu Leads.

Please can you let me know which FFP3 Respirators the DH are stockpiling so we can provide our staff with correct Fit-Testing procedures?

DH are procuring facemasks from Cardinal and 3M. We are currently speaking to them regarding possible "train the trainer" type sessions. When we have more information, we will communicate details through SHA Flu leads.