



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1450  
Ein cyf/Our ref EM/05746/24

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair  
Petitions Committee  
Senedd Cymru

[Petitions@senedd.wales](mailto:Petitions@senedd.wales)

08 July 2024

Dear Jack Sargeant MS,

Thank you for your letter of 24 May on behalf of the Petitions Committee regarding Petition P-06-1450 Welsh Government to take action to protect people from airborne infections in health care settings.

I will address each of the specific areas of the petition in turn

**Improve air quality in health & social care settings through addressing ventilation, air filtration and sterilisation:**

The Welsh Government, with the support of NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership – Specialist Estates Services (NWSSP-SES) and Public Health Wales (PHW), continues to introduce measures to improve air quality across health and social care. Effective ventilation and filtration are key to achieving this and by doing so, to mitigate the risks of infection. Some key actions have included:

- The issue of a new Welsh Health Technical Memorandum (WHTM) 03-01 – Specialised Ventilation for Healthcare Buildings Parts A & B which covers design, validation and operational performance. These documents provide detailed ventilation recommendations for all healthcare buildings, including primary and social care.
- Every health board and NHS trust in Wales has appointed Authorised Persons (APs) for ventilation, they ensure installations, maintenance and monitoring is completed to a compliant standard.
- Ventilation Safety Groups (VSG) are in place at all health boards and NHS trusts in Wales. These groups have the responsibility of ensuring all ventilation systems are designed, installed, tested, and maintained in accordance with the guidance.
- NWSSP-SES provides the services of an Authorising Engineer-Ventilation (AE-V) which is appointed as an independent advisor by health boards and NHS trusts to

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

undertake assessments of Authorised Persons, audit systems and their associated operational management. The Authorising Engineer is also a member of the Ventilation Safety Group.

- NWSSP-SES engineers undertake full validations on specialist ventilation systems when they are first installed. In addition, they complete critical ventilation plant verifications annually and external contractors are also commissioned to carry out this work which ensures all specialist ventilation systems are covered.

In relation to sterilisation, including air High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter purification, work is ongoing with NHS Improvement England NHSI/E and the rest of the UK NHS, including representatives from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), to validate its effectiveness in healthcare settings.

The social care sector in Wales has been provided with advisory publications through PHW and the Welsh Government with a focus on infection transmission and clearly referencing the importance of effective ventilation systems to mitigate these risks and improve air quality. Social care settings, such as care homes are people's home and not a clinical environment. The terms 'air filtration' and 'sterilisation' in relation to air quality are only relevant for healthcare settings.

Under Section 44 (4) (a) of The Regulated Services (Service Providers and Responsible Individuals) (Wales) Regulations 2017 providers of regulated services must ensure premises are "accessible, adequately lit, heated and ventilated". The regulating body, Care Inspectorate Wales, carries out regular inspections of the services and the environment is one of the areas reported on.

### **Reintroduce routine mask-wearing in those settings (as per WHO recommendation 20 Dec 2023), particularly respiratory masks:**

PHW's [Infection Prevention and Control Measures for Acute Respiratory Infections \(ARI\) including COVID-19 for Health and Care Settings - WALES](#) provides detailed advice about the appropriate use of face masks in clinical settings. It states that health and care staff should continue to wear FRSM (type IIR) when working in respiratory care pathways and when clinically caring for people with suspected/confirmed Covid-19 and flu. In all other clinical care areas, universal masking should be applied when there is known or suspected cluster transmission of acute respiratory infection, for example during an incident, outbreak, and/or if a new Covid-19 variant of concern emerges. Universal masking should also be considered in settings where patients are at high risk of infection due to immunosuppression e.g. oncology/haematology. This should be guided by local risk assessment and includes primary and community care staff.

This guidance was reviewed by PHW's infection, prevention and control experts following the emergence of the Covid-19 variant JN.1 and was considered to remain appropriate.

### **Reintroduce routine Covid testing - it is asymptomatic:**

In line with our long-term strategy for living safely with Covid-19, access to free testing focuses on supporting clinical management of people who are eligible for anti-viral treatments. For most people with symptoms of a respiratory infection (including Covid-19, our [Guidance for people with symptoms of a respiratory infection, including Covid-19](#) provides advice on how to manage symptoms and how to prevent onward transmission. As we now have high levels of population immunity to Covid-19, routine testing is no longer considered appropriate. Those who are most vulnerable to serious illness as a result of contracting Covid-19 are still protected through regular vaccinations and access to free testing and treatment.

**Ensure staff manuals fully cover preventing airborne infection:**

The [NIPCM - Public Health Wales \(nhs.wales\)](https://www.nhs.uk) and [Infection Prevention and Control Measures for Acute Respiratory Infections \(ARI\) including Covid-19 for Health and Care Settings - WALES](#) both cover the prevention of airborne infections.

**Provide public health information on the use of respiratory masks & HEPA air filtration against airborne infections:**

The Welsh Government works closely with PHW about public health information about all communicable diseases, including airborne infections. Our guidance for the general public on the management of acute respiratory infections includes when consideration of wearing a face mask may be appropriate.

With regards to HEPA air filter purification, work is ongoing with the NHS including representatives from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), to validate effectiveness in healthcare settings. Trials on their use within NHS Wales are being undertaken in conjunction with several health boards to validate their effectiveness.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

**Eluned Morgan AS/MS**

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol