



## POSITION STATEMENT

# on the management of suspected COVID-19 cases in police custody

14 December 2020

### Duty of Care

Healthcare professionals (HCPs) have a duty of care to their patients regardless of the setting they see them in. It should be remembered that detainees in police custody may be particularly vulnerable and have difficulty accessing health advice at other times.

The FFLM is aware that in some cases HCPs have been refusing to assess detainees based on suspicion of COVID-19. Detainees in police custody are entitled to the same standards of care expected in any other healthcare setting. For its part the GMC has made clear that it expects doctors to respond responsibly and reasonably to the circumstances they face, and to be able to explain any decisions they make.

The GMC has also said that if you have pre-existing health conditions that increase your risk of infection, you should discuss this with colleagues and your employer - it may be appropriate to ask another suitably qualified clinician to take over the care of patients who are suspected to have or who have coronavirus. Additionally, it may be appropriate to modify usual procedures to accommodate and minimise risk. This might include giving medications at the cell hatch rather than taking patients to the clinical room. Individual clinicians will have to make a dynamic risk based assessments as to how they assess each detainee.

Management of acute and chronic illness in the custody suite should not suffer. However potential cases of COVID-19 should be treated as a public health risk.

Although it is reasonable for custody sergeants to consider carefully which patients need a face to face assessment by the HCP there are a number of detainees who will need to be seen and assessed face to face. These include (but are not limited to):

- Road traffic procedures
  - Section 4;
  - Section 5a;
  - Section 5 where an intoximeter is not available (hospital procedures);
  - Officers may consider going direct to urine where possible (not suitable for Section 5a cases)
- Serious offences where forensic evidence is a priority
  - Sexual offences (DNA swabs)
  - Drug related crime (samples for toxicology etc)
- Suspected [terrorist detainees](#)

In line with the [FFLM quality standards \(2019\)](#) all nurses and paramedics should have access (by

telephone as a minimum) to advice from an experienced forensic physician, ideally with FFLM Membership or Fellowship.

We would therefore expect providers to ensure that all custody sergeants have access to telephone advice from an experienced forensic physician who can triage, provide telephone advice and authorise medication administration as appropriate.

### Basic Precautions

Providers should ensure that robust infection control policies are both available and adhered to. This should happen anyway but is particularly relevant in the current situation.

Hygiene precautions, although simple, must be done well:

- Regular handwashing, at least 20 seconds using soap and water
- Bare below the elbows
- Wear scrubs at work if possible
- Frequent use of alcohol gel (wherever practical)
- No food or drink in clinical areas
- Avoid wearing uniforms outside of the work environment (consider use of alginate bags to take work clothes home to wash, ideally at 60°C)
- Ensure a change of clothes is available so that you do not have to travel in potentially contaminated clothes.

In view of the rapidly changing situation, at the beginning of each shift clinicians should liaise with custody sergeants and detention officers to confirm local arrangements for screening and assessment of detainees suspected of having COVID-19.

### Criteria

Clinicians should ensure they keep up to date with latest guidance published via Public Health England.

Be alert to the possibility of atypical presentations in detainees who are immunocompromised especially those with substance use disorders.

In view of community transmission, travel history/exposure is unlikely to be relevant and clinicians should be alert to the possibility of COVID-19 infection in detainees presenting with:

- New and continuous cough **AND/OR**
- High Temperature **AND/OR**
- a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell -anosmia



Detainees who present with a cough and/or high temperature and/or anosmia should be advised to follow the [PHE guidance on self-isolation](#) following release from custody.

Thermometers, as with other medical equipment should be regularly calibrated. Clinicians should be aware that, particularly after coming inside from the cold, patients' temperatures may initially read colder than their core temperature on forehead or tympanic thermometers and therefore this should be taken into account when screening on arrival.

Clinicians should also be aware of the significant overlap of above criteria with usual illnesses such as tonsillitis.

Particular attention should be paid to detainees in vulnerable groups:

- aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
- under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (ie anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds):
  - chronic respiratory diseases, such as asthma, COPD, emphysema or bronchitis
  - chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
  - chronic kidney disease
  - chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
  - chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy
  - diabetes
  - problems with your spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or post splenectomy
  - immunocompromised as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
  - seriously overweight (BMI of 40) and above
  - those who are pregnant

## PPE

Suspected patients should be asked to wear a surgical facemask whilst moving between areas.

As front-line healthcare workers clinicians should seek specific PPE guidance from their employer. However, based on [current guidance](#) the following would appear reasonable:

### Within the custody suite

In view of recommendations for staff in [community and social care settings](#) it seems sensible to recommend use of a fluid resistant (Type IIR) surgical mask when working in areas that you are unlikely to be able to maintain 2m social distance even if not providing direct patient care this is also likely to be the case for officers booking in detainees or searching them.

We recommend that a mask, gloves, and apron as are used for all detainee assessments, even if detainee is not suspected of having COVID.

This mask should be disposed of on leaving the custody area and a fresh one used on re-entering.

### Direct care of detainee (within 2 metres) with suspected or confirmed COVID

Fluid resistant (type IIR) surgical mask, visor/eye protection, plastic apron (consider sleeve protection to reduce droplet transmission risk to bare skin or clothes) and gloves. Gloves, aprons, gowns and masks are all single use in this case and dependent on decontamination options for eye protection this may also need to be single use and changed between detainees.

### Suspected or confirmed COVID for resuscitation or aerosol generating procedures

FFP3 respirator mask, visors, long sleeved gown and gloves

Clinicians should consult with their employer regarding fit testing for FFP3 respirator masks and be aware that face shape and presence of stubble may mean that masks do not seal adequately to provide protection. Ideally clinicians should also be trained in [donning](#) and [doffing](#) technique of PPE to minimise risk of contamination.

## Diagnostic Swabs

These should only be performed if you have had training and may take days to come back so are unlikely to be of use in the custody setting. If a detainee is being recalled to prison it may be useful to liaise with public health locally regarding swabbing prior to transfer.

## Resuscitation Modifications

We recognise that clinicians may have difficulty in accessing an ILS course during the current crisis and accept that it is reasonable to defer attending courses until the situation has resolved. However clinicians should ensure they keep themselves up to date via the [RC\(UK\) website](#).

### Recognition of Cardiac Arrest

Look for absence of signs of life and normal breathing. If competent check for a carotid pulse.

The primary change here is that it is **not** currently recommended to listen or feel by placing ear and cheek close to the patients mouth.

### Resuscitation

If a shockable rhythm 3 shocks may be administered prior to commencing compressions.

Ensure that PPE is worn as above before commencing compressions.

Mouth to mouth, and pocket mask ventilation is **not recommended**. If you do not have access to a bag



valve mask then compression only CPR is recommended.

Please see the updated ALS algorithm on page 4 and FAQ on page 5.

## Clinician Risk Assessment

Employers owe a duty of care to their employees and should, therefore, undertake a work based risk assessment.

Useful tools to assess individual risk have been collated by the BMA on their [COVID-19: risk assessment page](#).

Although risk assessments must be carried out on an individual basis factors which may increase the risk of contracting COVID-19 or having a greater impact if contracted include:

- age
- ethnicity
- biological sex
- disability
- health conditions
- pregnancy

## Forensic Sampling

Clinicians should wear appropriate PPE when in close contact with detainees (Fluid resistant masks, Apron, Gloves +/- eye protection). This includes taking forensic samples including swabs & blood.

- Treat all forensic samples as a biological hazard.
- All samples taken during the pandemic should be labelled with COVID-19 risk
- The police officer should carefully wash their hands, ideally with soap and water or alcohol gel if soap not available, after handling the sample bags.
- Evidence shows that COVID-19 appears to live for 72 hours on plastic, 48 hours on stainless steel and 24 hours on cardboard.
- Therefore, samples requiring freezing should be handled with care and frozen as soon as possible.
- Coronavirus is not destroyed by freezing, therefore the risk of infection remains with frozen samples. Therefore, samples should be stored in a manner that minimises future risk. Any handling of the bags should be done using double gloves and followed by careful cleaning

## Intoximeter Usage

Part of the specification for Home Office type approval means that air flow is one way so theoretically, although contaminated air may be blown into the machine it should not be able to come back. This is analogous to previous concerns with HIV and hepatitis.

However, in view of the potential need to deep clean intoxicimeter rooms where a high risk or confirmed case

of COVID-19 has been seen there may be an increase in requests for blood samples from detainees. Clinicians and providers should be aware of this and have contingency plans for this increased demand.

## Detainees on Non-Invasive Ventilation (NIV)

NIV such as Continuous Positive Airway Pressure ventilation (CPAP) is an aerosol generating procedure. The use of NIV poses a risk to clinicians, officers, and other detainees in the custody suite. Therefore if this is in use within the custody environment anyone in the vicinity needs level 3 PPE (Gown, glove, visor, FFP3 mask etc).

If it is not possible for the detainee to be bailed or released under investigation then suitable facilities need to be found within the custody suite to keep the detainee away from other detainees. Once an aerosol generating procedure such as NIV has occurred then the air in that area needs at least 1 hour to settle prior to cleaning, in that period all staff entering the area must wear level 3 PPE.

The FFLM recommend forces consider this risk and develop appropriate local contingency plans.

## Remote Assessments

Providers should explore options for telemedicine within custody suites.

However, it must be recognised that that remote assessments may limit the quality of a clinical assessment. Where a reduced assessment has been carried out due to COVID-19 precautions this must be clearly documented.

Providers should consider utilising clinicians who are self-isolating to support their colleagues with telephone advice. Apps such as [Hospify](#) (which has been approved by the NHS Apps library) may also be useful to support clinician communication where face to face engagement is not possible.

## Telephone Consultations

RCGP has some useful [guidance](#) on these assessments. They are likely to be of particular use where:

- the diagnosis is fairly clear;  
**AND**
- there are no 'red flags', and the detainee seems well to custody staff,  
**AND**
- the detainee is willing to accept reassurance and advice.

In a custody setting telephone consultations may be particularly useful to replace some automatic consultations such as when a detainee returns from hospital. It may be appropriate for this to be replaced by a discussion between the custody sergeant and HCP to assess the need provided that an adequate



discharge summary has been supplied by the hospital.

Face to face consultations are likely to be needed when the diagnosis or severity of the symptoms are unclear or it is difficult to obtain a reliable history from the detainee.

### Hospital Transfer/ED Referral

If it is felt clinically necessary to transfer a detainee to hospital, staff must liaise with both nurse-in-charge of the emergency department as well as the local ambulance trust.

It is imperative that if a detainee is suspected of having COVID-19 both the receiving and transporting services are made aware.

It would be prudent for local clinical leads to liaise with clinical leads at their nearest emergency department to ascertain what, if any, changes there are to local protocols. It may be that cases need to be diverted to alternate sites.

### Resilience and Contingency Planning

Providers and police forces must explore contingency planning to take into account the increased probability of rota gaps to cover clinicians who are either recalled to work within NHS settings or who may need to self isolate (see table on right)

It would be prudent to liaise with organisations providing services to neighbouring forces so that services can be maintained.

Unprecedented challenges such as this are likely to require significantly increased collaboration between organisations which may have previously been in competition.

### Reporting to Public Health

The local health protection team should be informed of any case which occurs in a prison or place of detention. Providers should ensure that procedures are in place to support staff in this duty.

### Clinician Infection

Guidance is continually evolving on this and providers will need to make decisions based on the latest Public Health Guidance as well as internal workforce planning.

At present the consensus is that simple work related exposure to patients with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 with or without PPE allows clinicians to carry on working as normal unless they develop symptoms. Line managers should, however, be informed of any potential exposure via normal incident reporting systems.

Clinicians who develop symptoms consistent with COVID of any degree of severity should self-isolate immediately (usually for 10 days) symptomatic individuals should be tested for COVID-19. Providers should ensure they have a strategy for employee

testing considering the potential for asymptomatic carriers in the workforce.

Tests need to be done in the first 5 days of having symptoms. Individuals can book a test at the following sites:

- [England](#)
- [Wales](#)
- [Scotland](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)

Self-isolation is only recommended for asymptomatic clinicians if someone in their house is symptomatic (this isolation period is also for 10 days rather than the previous 14 days as of Dec 2020). Symptoms in household members that should prompt clinician self-isolation are:

- New and continuous cough **AND/OR**
- High temperature (in absence of alternative source of infection such as UTI) **AND/OR**
- a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell -anosmia

### Useful Sources of information

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance#guidance-for-health-professionals>

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/>

<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>

<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/a-to-z-of-topics/covid-19/>

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

<https://www.resus.org.uk/media/statements/resuscitation-council-uk-statements-on-covid-19-coronavirus-cpr-and-resuscitation/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-prisons-and-other-prescribed-places-of-detention-guidance/covid-19-prisons-and-other-prescribed-places-of-detention-guidance>

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/noras-blog/2020/03/covid-19-potential-implications-individuals-substance-use-disorders>

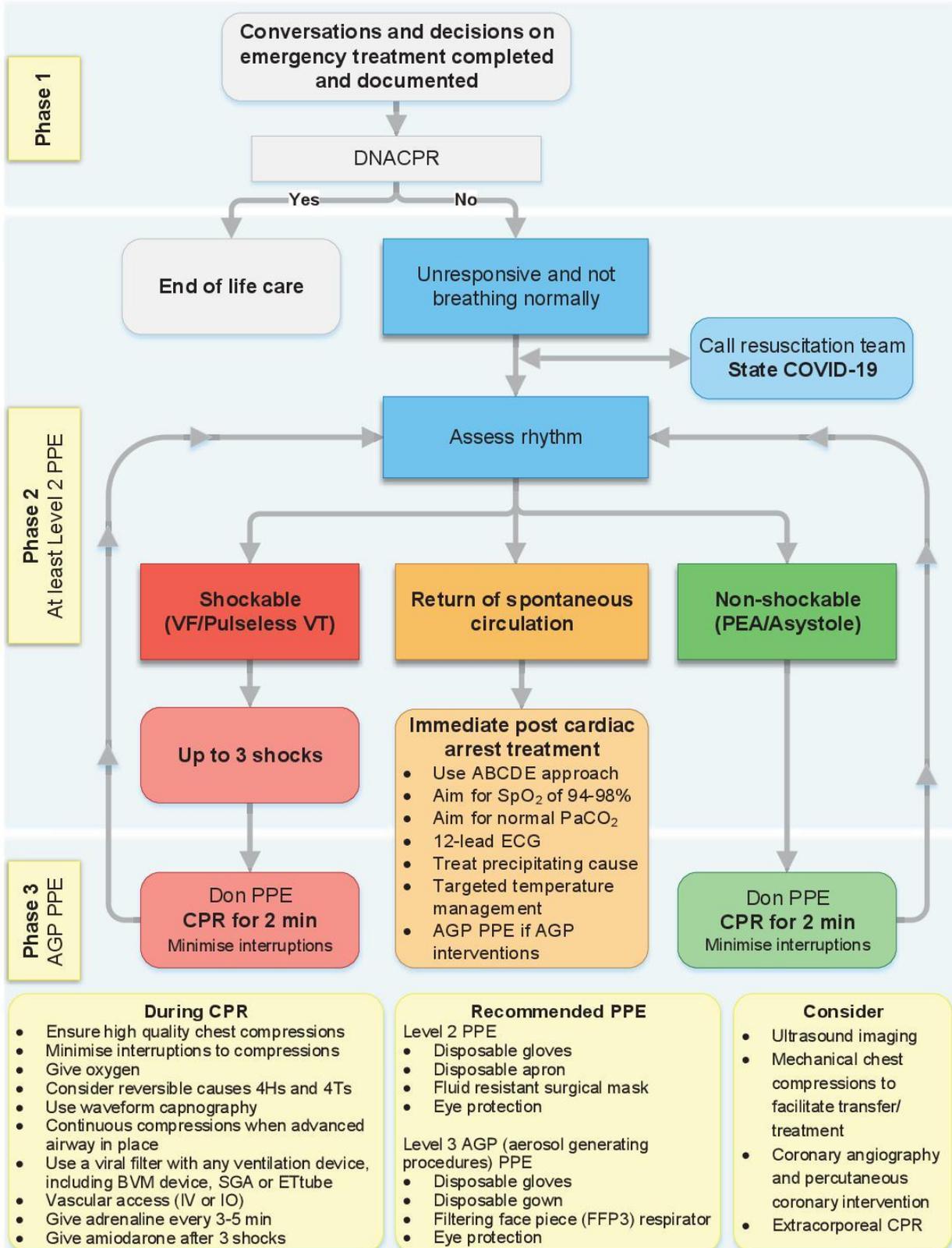
Produced on behalf of the FFLM by Dr Alex J Gorton  
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Resuscitation Council UK

Adult Advanced Life Support for COVID-19 patients – Acute hospital settings



30/04/2020