Fit Testing Update: May 2020

At the end of March 2020 the Trust made the decision to pause our programme of fit mask testing. This was due to the lack of a consistent and constant supply of masks, and lack of solution and other consumables to perform the tests.

There are two methods of delivering fit test training across the Trust sites and this is based on established processes that have been in place previously. The Portacount method is used at the QE, it is a quantitative approach and the approach we will use for the whole organisation moving forward. Solihull, Good Hope and Heartlands Hospitals currently use a qualitative method which involves a bitter or sweet tasting solution to establish if a seal has been made with an FFP3 mask. Both methods are approved by the health and safety executive.

Fit checking is a requirement each and every time an FFP3 mask is worn to ensure the seal to your face is adequate. Fit testing is a Health and Safety legislative requirement but does not negate the necessity to fit check. The Trust standard on fit checking will continue for all Trust colleagues for constant assurance of effective respiratory protection and this will continue to be accessible to all colleagues on Moodle.

The decision to restart fit mask testing has been under constant review, and at the beginning of May there was reassurance regarding the supply of masks, and consumables for testing had been delivered. Fit testing was restarted on 11 May 2020. The masks we are currently testing on are a 3M brand; we are supplied these from the Department of Health.

As testing has recommenced, a number of staff have failed the fit test but have been wearing the mask post checking for the last 6 weeks.

If exposure to Covid had occurred and symptoms present, then a test would be performed as per policy.

A failed fit test does not mean that you are unprotected, a fit checked FFP3 mask is still offering protection when undertaking aerosol generating procedures but not the 99% assurance of a fit tested FFP3 mask.

A cluster randomised controlled trial in 2011 had undertaken a comparison of fit tested respirators to non-fit-tested respirators. The findings concluded that non-fit-tested respirators were significantly protective against clinical respiratory illness and all non-fit-tested wearers in the study were protected against laboratory confirmed viruses.

If there are particular concerns that individuals wish to raise, please contact the Trust PPE group COVID19PPE@uhb.nhs.uk

References