Report of survey findings
PPE and testing during the COVID-19 pandemic
Introduction

The Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCS) has undertaken two surveys of UK surgeons and trainees working during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a report of findings of our second survey, published on 30 April 2020. Results of our first survey were published on 12 April 2020.

This second survey ran over five days - from 23 to 28 April 2020. We received responses from over 1,200 surgeons and trainees across the UK.

The headlines reveal that access to PPE continues to be an issue for surgical teams. Surgeons are also concerned that the PPE they have been provided with has not been properly FIT-tested. Worryingly, some respondents say they have felt under pressure to perform procedures on confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients, without access to adequate PPE.

The findings also reveal widespread support amongst surgeons and trainees for the introduction of regular COVID-19 testing for all patient-facing NHS staff, including those who are asymptomatic. The vast majority of respondents said that COVID-19 tests were reserved for those staff who had symptoms.

Fortunately, most surgeons and trainees report that urgent and emergency surgery has been maintained during the course of the pandemic. The RCS, working with surgical specialty associations, recently produced a ‘Clinical guide to surgical prioritisation’ during the coronavirus pandemic, which the majority of respondents said they were aware of.

Methodology

The RCS survey fieldwork ran from 23 April 2020 to 28 April 2020. The survey was completed by 1,263 surgeons and surgical trainees.

Some questions asked respondents to agree or disagree with a given statement – they were asked to answer “disagree strongly”, “disagree”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “agree” or “agree strongly”. A “don’t know” option was also included for respondents who were unsure how to respond. Relevant data on pages 7 - 11 of this document show the full results.

The figures in this report are reported on a UK-wide basis, across all specialties and career grades. For each figure an ‘n’ is given to indicate the sample size i.e. the number of respondents to the given question.

If you have any queries about this report please contact publicaffairs@rcseng.ac.uk
### Key findings: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

A third (32.8%) of surgeons and trainees surveyed across the UK (n = 1,183) did not believe they had an adequate supply of PPE in their Trust enabling them to do their jobs safely. (Q14). A similar result was recorded in our first survey.

‘Advice about the level of PPE varies across the region as does access. Trust advice is clearly led by availability of PPE. We are being asked to reuse masks and gowns.’

Consultant, Yorkshire and the Humber

When asked about which items of PPE they had personally seen shortages of in the previous two weeks, the most common responses were (n = 1,159):

- Full, long-sleeved, fluid repellent surgical gowns or fluid repellent coveralls (34.1%)
- FFP2 or FFP3 respirator masks (30.5%)
- Full face visors (28.8%)

Just over a third (35.2%) of respondents (n = 1,159) said there had been no shortages of PPE in their workplace over the previous two weeks. (Q15)

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**Thinking about the last two weeks, have you personally seen shortages in your workplace of any of the following items?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There Have Been No Shortages In My Workplace</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full, Long-sleeved, Fluid Repellent Surgical Gown Or Fluid Repellent Coveralls</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFP2 or FFP3 Respirator Masks</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Face Visors</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polycarbonate Safety Spectacles Or Surgical Masks With Integrated Visors</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposable, Non-fluid Repellent Gowns Or Coveralls</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluid-resistant (Type IIR) Surgical Masks</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know Or Not Applicable</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reusable (Washable) Gowns Or Coveralls</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposable Plastic Aprons</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposable Plastic Gloves</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘Increasing globalisation in recent decades has resulted in countries being less self-sufficient. In times of plenty and reliable supply chains, PPE and single-use items is achievable, but in times of crisis, this country is unable to self-sustain the demand. We, the UK, should ensure greater self-reliance and sustainability in future - supply from within UK, less single use equipment and a return to more re-usable equipment.’

Consultant General Surgeon

Over a quarter (26.6%) of respondents said that, in the previous two weeks, they were not confident that the PPE they had been provided with was FIT-tested to an adequate standard, enabling them to do their job as safely as possible (n = 1,186). (Q16)

14.9% of surgeons and trainees (n = 1,187) said that in the previous two weeks they had been put under pressure to undertake procedures on COVID-19 positive, or suspected COVID-19 positive, patients without an appropriate level of properly fitted PPE. (Q17)

‘We feel coerced into working without adequate PPE, and instead have been trying to buy FFP3 masks at our own expense which cannot be FIT-tested.’

Dental Surgeon, North West

Key findings: COVID-19 testing

A significant majority (80.2%) of respondents (n = 1,221) believed that testing should be available on a regular basis to all patient-facing NHS staff, even if they are asymptomatic. (Q10)

‘Test test test will be the ongoing mantra. If we can and do do it for MRSA this should be regarded as no different and in fact more critical.’

Consultant, Yorkshire

OVER
1/4
not confident PPE is FIT-tested

15% under pressure to undertake procedures on potential COVID-19 patients without appropriate PPE

8 out of 10 believe asymptomatic testing should be available to staff
Just 7.5% of respondents (n = 1,219) said that asymptomatic staff were being tested in their workplace, with 82.4% saying tests were reserved for those displaying symptoms. (Q11)

Are staff in your workplace already being tested for COVID-19 even if they are asymptomatic?

- Yes
- No - tests are being reserved for staff with symptoms
- Don't Know

Over half (52.4%) of respondents (n = 1,220) said that based on their own experience or the experience of their colleagues, they would be able to access a COVID-19 test at their workplace if they were granted one. (Q12)

Based on your experience and that of your colleagues, if you are granted a COVID-19 test, where would you be able to access it?

- At My Own Workplace
- Within 5 Miles Of My Workplace
- Within 10 Miles Of My Workplace
- Within 50 Miles Of My Workplace
- More Than 50 Miles From My Workplace
- Don't Know

On the basis of their own experience or the experience of colleagues, 60% of respondents (n = 1,219) believed they would receive the results of a COVID-19 test within 48 hours if they were granted one. (Q13)

‘I think it’s vital as soon as an adequate serology test is available that all NHS medical staff get these tests but in the meantime I 100% agree that REGULAR swab testing of staff to catch people at the asymptomatic phase is another option.’

General Surgeon, South East England
Key findings: Urgent and emergency surgery

A substantial majority (78.9%) of surgeons and trainees (n = 1,174) said that urgent and emergency surgery had been maintained at their workplace. (Q19)

Rate your agreement with the following statement: Urgent and emergency surgery has been maintained at my workplace.

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‘Our hospital management have done a really good job to coordinate teams, protect staff and provide a service during corona virus epidemic. They have continued to prioritise trauma and urgent orthopaedic procedures like sarcomas and myelopathy...We can always criticise but given the circumstances they are providing a very good emergency service while maintaining capacity to deal with expected numbers of covid-19.’

Trauma and Orthopaedic Surgeon, Scotland

The vast majority (83.7%) of respondents (n = 1,176) said that they were aware of guidance written by the Royal College of Surgeons of England and surgical specialty associations; our ‘Clinical guide to surgical prioritisation during the coronavirus pandemic’. (Q18)

‘It is hard to see how cardiothoracic surgery is going to restart in any meaningful way (for urgent or even elective patients) - until we find a way to disentangle the specialist anaesthetists from COVID cover within ITU. There also needs to be greater attempts to separate out the COVID and non-COVID parts of the hospital - now that we are past the peak of the pandemic. Cardiac surgery is particularly hard hit (due to its reliance on ITU) - and unless resolved soon I can see many months of patients (even urgent inpatients) being denied operations.’

Cardiothoracic Surgeon, North East England
Data

Please note that the percentages given in the following graphs may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.

**QUESTION 10:** Please rate your agreement with the following statement:
I believe testing should be available on a regular basis to all patient-facing NHS staff, even if they are asymptomatic. (N = 1,221)

- **Strongly Agree:** 681 (55.8%)
- **Agree:** 298 (24.4%)
- **Don't Know:** 100 (8.2%)
- **Neither Agree Nor Disagree:** 95 (7.8%)
- **Disagree:** 20 (1.6%)
- **Strongly Disagree:** 27 (2.2%)

**QUESTION 11:** Are staff in your workplace already being tested for COVID-19 even if they are asymptomatic? (N = 1,219)

- **Yes:** 1,005 (82.4%)
- **No - tests are being reserved for staff with symptoms:** 123 (10.1%)
- **Don't Know:** 91 (7.5%)

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PPE and testing during the COVID-19 pandemic
QUESTION 12: Based on your experience and that of your colleagues, if you are granted a COVID-19 test, where would you be able to access it? (N = 1,220)

At My Own Workplace: 52.4% (699)
Within 5 Miles Of My Workplace: 17.6% (205)
Within 10 Miles Of My Workplace: 18% (220)
Within 50 Miles Of My Workplace: 8.4% (102)
More Than 50 Miles From My Workplace: 3.1% (38)
Don't Know: 0.5% (6)

QUESTION 13: Based on your experience and that of your colleagues, if you are granted a COVID-19 test, how long would it take for the results to come back? (N = 1,219)

Up To 24 Hours: 39% (475)
Up To 48 Hours: 18.2% (222)
Up To 78 Hours: 16.2% (197)
Up To A Week: 21% (256)
More Than A Week: 4.8% (59)
Don't Know: 0.8% (10)

QUESTION 14: Please rate your agreement with the following statement:
I now believe there is a supply of adequate PPE in my workplace, enabling me
to do my job as safely as possible. (N = 1,183)

QUESTION 15: Thinking about the last two weeks, have you personally seen shortages
in your workplace of any of the following items? Tick all that apply. (N = 1,159)
QUESTION 16: Thinking about the past two weeks, please rate your agreement with the following statement: I am confident that the PPE I have been provided with has been FIT-tested to adequate standard, enabling me to do my job as safely as possible. (N = 1,186)

![Bar chart showing responses to Question 16.]

QUESTION 17: Thinking about the past two weeks, please rate your agreement with the following statement: I have been put under pressure to undertake procedures on COVID-19 positive, or suspected COVID-19 positive, patients without an appropriate level of properly fitted PPE. (N = 1,187)

![Bar chart showing responses to Question 17.]

PPE and testing during the COVID-19 pandemic
QUESTION 18: Were you aware of the surgical prioritisation guidance? (N = 1,176)

- Yes: 83.7% (984)
- No: 12.8% (151)
- Don't Know: 3.5% (41)

QUESTION 19: Please rate your agreement with the following statement: Urgent and emergency surgery has been maintained at my workplace. (N = 1,174)

- Strongly Agree: 32.3% (379)
- Agree: 46.6% (547)
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 8.2% (95)
- Disagree: 7.8% (91)
- Strongly Disagree: 4.2% (49)