

RCSLT policy statement: Transparent face masks

22 September 2020

There is a communication challenge for all regarding reduced clarity and audibility while wearing face masks and face coverings. There is also an issue of equality in respect of the deaf community and those with hearing impairment, who rely on lip reading to communicate on an equal basis. It is also the case that the appearance of opaque personal protective equipment (PPE) may be distressing or confusing for people with communication challenges, including potentially people with aphasia, autism, dementia or learning disability, as well as for children.

As health services restart, it is not always possible for speech and language therapists (SLTs) to work at a two-metre distance from their clients. By the nature of what they do, which is supporting and developing someone's speech, language and communication, it is very important that their client can see their mouth and face, in a safe manner. The use of transparent face masks is therefore vital.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) has been lobbying for the introduction of transparent face masks over the past months. Progress has been made and the UK Government has confirmed that ClearMask™ is the supplier whose mask has been approved for use across the NHS and social care in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. At time of writing it is still not clear when Scottish Government will issue guidance on the use of transparent masks in Scotland. Scottish Government is working with manufacturing and other partners in Scotland on the development and supply of transparent type IIR fluid resistant surgical masks (FRSM) and is keeping RCSLT informed of progress.

The ClearMask™ is single use per patient contact. The instructions say that it cannot be used in high-risk or surgical environments or during invasive procedures or aerosol generating procedures (AGPs). It should not be used where there is risk of excessive splashing or spraying of body fluids. The mask has not been assessed for bacterial efficiency to protect the client from the SLT and should therefore not be used in place of a Type I or Type II surgical mask or Type IIR FRSM to protect vulnerable clients. It also cannot be used if there is a potential risk of COVID-19 in the setting.

RCSLT strongly advises that SLTs trial using the ClearMask™ before seeing their clients so that they can assess suitability and safety. RCSLT also recommends that before using this product a risk assessment **must** be conducted using the RCSLT risk assessment framework, which is in the [RCSLT guidance on reducing the risk of transmission and use of PPE](#). SLTs who have access to local infection prevention teams should also discuss infection prevention and control (IPC) measures with the team.

RCSLT is hearing feedback from its members that there are concerns with fit and movement of the ClearMask™ during exaggerated facial movements, resulting in gapping and uncovering of the nose

and/or mouth. The RCSLT is discussing these concerns with the Department of Health and Social Care.

At present only one product is available through NHS supply chains, however other products are being developed and tested. RCSLT advises that it is essential that rigorous health and safety standards are adhered to, and that any mask be tested, certified and approved for use by government to ensure that SLTs and those with whom we work are properly protected at all times.