

**Freedom of Information Request**

**Ref: 22-451**

9 September 2022

By Email

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for your request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Trust's response is as follows:

- We can confirm that we do hold the information you are requesting

**What are your plans to reduce the sickness absence rate and fill the vacancies for doctors and nurses ahead of winter when admissions may increase?**

Sickness absence is managed throughout the year with a range of supporting actions, a full programme of health and wellbeing initiatives, including psychological support, there is an Occupational health service, 24-hour Employee Assistance scheme in place for all staff in supporting their attendance. The Trust has an active and dynamic on-going recruitment programme, which includes international recruitment to fill our vacancies.

**Do you have a plan in place to increase the number of general and acute beds available now, over the next six months and a longer-term plan to ensure sufficient beds?**

We have recently completed a second phase of extending A701 and A801 with 10 beds in total now in place, and there are also plans being considered to expand the Bristol Heart Institute.

**What plans does the trust have in place to tackle the current waiting list and clear the back logs? What is the long-term plan to ensure waiting lists remain low so that patients are reassured they will be treated quickly?**

Please see the link below for the system plan:

[https://bnssg.icb.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/ICBBoard\\_1Jul22\\_item5.1.pdf](https://bnssg.icb.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/ICBBoard_1Jul22_item5.1.pdf)

**Please provide clear clinical and scientific evidence to support the decision to force NHS staff to wear masks in order to reduce the spread of respiratory viruses and the results of any impact assessment carried out at your trust that considered the impact on staff and their physical and mental health.**

We have implemented national guidance which is informed by clinical and scientific evidence. This includes evidence of symptomatic and asymptomatic spread of SARS-CoV-2 with the new variants being more transmissible. The wearing of surgical face masks is part of the

strategy to reduce transmission in the context of the ongoing pandemic.

We have determined that the potential risk in inpatient clinical areas of the onward asymptomatic spread of SARS-CoV-2 remains. As a consequence, we have retained that staff wear surgical face masks when providing direct clinical care to patient in inpatient wards, including wards or departments who manage patients with respiratory infections or have patients who are immunocompromised.

If the patients or staff wish to continue wearing masks they can do so. Wearing of masks in transit areas such as corridors is not required.

**Please provide evidence that the restriction on the number of visitors has reduced the spread of a respiratory virus and details of consultations carried out with patients to assess the impact on their wellbeing.**

The importance of patients well being and the role that visitors play in this is clearly understood. The impact of national guidance on stopping visitors has been significant in the earlier stages of the pandemic, to both the patients and the visitors, when situations occur with perhaps loss of loved ones. As an organisation we have monitored the guidance and been sensitive to the approach to visiting which has been closely scrutinised by the senior team. A significant proportion of the inpatient beds are multiple occupancy bays, which means that visitors exposure if they have SARS-CoV-2, could be to a wider group of patients than the individual they are visiting.

The specific numbers of cases and occurrences is not accessible.

**Why are staff and patients still being tested with PCR tests? What is the plan to phase out PCR testing and rely on actual clinical diagnosis on patients and staff with symptoms?**

University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust's policies and procedures regarding SARS-CoV-2 testing are directly aligned with national guidance - [Managing healthcare staff with symptoms of a respiratory infection or a positive COVID-19 test result - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/managing-healthcare-staff-with-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-or-a-positive-covid-19-test-result), and [COVID-19: testing during periods of low prevalence - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-testing-during-periods-of-low-prevalence) the current intention of which is to reduce the number of PCR tests undertaken. As described in the national guidance, PCR testing is no longer generally available to staff, and patients will only be PCR-tested in specific circumstances. We have continued to use more PCR tests than most NHS organisations and have been out of kilter with the national guidance a bit.

The rationale for screening with PCR and not lateral-flow device (LFD) was an operational challenge, however we have also been using point-of-care testing (POCT) as well.

This concludes our response. We trust that you find this helpful, but please do not hesitate to contact us directly if we can be of any further assistance.

If, after that, you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review. Internal review requests should be submitted within two months of the date of receipt of the response to your original letter and should be addressed to:

Data Protection Officer  
University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust

Trust Headquarters  
Marlborough Street  
Bristol  
BS1 3NU

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF

### Publication

Please note that this letter and the information included/attached will be published on our website as part of the Trust's Freedom of Information Publication Log. This is because information disclosed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act is disclosed to the public, not just to the individual making the request. We will remove any personal information (such as your name, email and so on) from any information we make public to protect your personal information.

To view the Freedom of Information Act in full please click [here](#).

Yours sincerely

**Freedom of Information Team**  
**University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust**