



The Royal College of Emergency Medicine

Safety Flash

Update March 2021

COVID-19

Communication errors with PPE



Necessary PPE creates communication difficulties and this is recognised to contribute to avoidable incidents

- Speech is muffled, exacerbated by ambient noise
- Verbal requests could be misunderstood leading to error
- Telephone communication can be affected
- Non-verbal cues are lost making empathy difficult to convey
- Lip reading is difficult for people with impaired hearing

Suggestions/solutions

- Try to reduce ambient noise when handing over
- Move to a non PPE area for vital phone calls
- Communicate slowly, clearly and with increased volume
- Check what was said and ask for the communication loop to be closed (i.e. to repeat back what has been heard)
- Use small portable white boards to write instructions/advice on
- Consider Silent Simulation OSCE's, Simulation (**Adult** and **Paediatric**) scenario's in full PPE as part of educational training in the department
- Use A4 copy of photo of face without mask on

With Thanks to Dr Rajesh Vasiraju, Dr Ffion Davis and Professor Tim Coats

References: [Reducing medical error during a pandemic](#) and [Communication in Emergency Medical Teams](#)

Disclaimer– Professor Coats has not received formal patient feedback on the use of an A4 photo but, would encourage trying and gathering feedback.

For Safety Alerts and RCEM issued Safety Flashes see:

www.rcem.ac.uk/SafetyAlerts