

Make mask supply mandatory for health workers

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Inadequate supply of face masks reported in some hospitals and widespread confusion about when and what masks are needed represent a serious public health hazard that endangers many Australians, the Consumers Health Forum said today.

“The ongoing problems with supply of masks generally, and particularly of hospital-grade masks, highlights the need for mandatory measures to ensure all health settings are adequately supplied,” the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said today.

“This is vital for the safety of health staff, but also for the community at large to ensure that the spread of coronavirus is contained by all possible means.

“It is disturbing that surveys of public hospital nursing and medical staff are showing that significant numbers of nurses and doctors are experiencing limited access to face masks provided by their hospital.

“A survey by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians reported that nearly half of respondents said there was limited or no access to the hospital-grade N95/P2 masks.

“What is frustrating is that the overall availability of these masks is not so much an issue as the failure of various institutions to ensure their staff have adequate supplies.

“While some hospitals and their at-risk hospital staff report that they can't be sure of getting these masks, the same items are available for sale to the public in the shops.

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“The hospital-grade masks are designed for high infection zones and are not ordinarily necessary for general public use where standard face masks can provide protection against COVID.

“The continuing uncertainty and confusion about the wearing of face masks and when to do so also warrants a more comprehensive and impactful communications strategy by federal and state governments.

“The COVID pandemic is exerting great pressures on the community to make big changes to their behaviour, including donning masks in crowded environments like supermarkets.

“A more concerted public education campaign to encourage people to wear the appropriate masks at the right time would be of significant support to community health right now,” Ms Wells said.

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