

INDEPENDENT PANEL
ON
HIGH RISK AEROSOL GENERATING
PROCEDURES
(AGP)

Terms of reference

November 2020

Independent Panel on High Risk Aerosol Generating Procedures (AGP)

Terms of Reference

The independent Panel on High Risk Aerosol Generating Procedures (AGP) is a UK wide, independent, non-executive expert advisory panel.

Its purpose is to provide practical and scientific advice to the Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on specific high risk AGPs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be done by assessing the evidence for complex and unclear cases, where there are differing views on defining aerosol generating procedures; taking into account the potential route of transmission and making recommendations for the appropriate classification.

In doing this, the panel will:

- assess the evidence to determine whether specific medical procedures should be classified as high risk AGPs and commission reviews of scientific evidence where considered necessary or appropriate
- consider the work of other expert groups or committees and evidence provided by professional bodies
- be kept abreast of recent scientific progress regarding AGPs and risk of transmission and liaise with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the international community to share knowledge on high risk AGPs
- identify gaps in the current guidance on AGPs, that require further clarification and make recommendations to the 4 CMOs for prioritisation.
- make its findings and recommendations available to the 4 nations CMOs and the public in a way which aims to be comprehensive, understandable and timely.
- review and evaluate the effectiveness of the ongoing work of the panel
- operate in line with the government's principles for scientific advice. Although the panel is not a committee, it will follow the code of practice for scientific advisory committees¹, including making the work of the panel open, transparent and accessible as well as strengthening public and patient engagement.

It is out of scope for the panel:

- to develop guidance on AGPs, this is the responsibility of the national guidance organisations
- to provide advice on the application of its recommendations, as it will be for the national healthcare systems in the 4 UK health administration to do this, as well as provide support for healthcare workers to make appropriate risk assessment prior to undertaking AGPs

- to review cases previously defined as high risk AGPs where there is reasonable consensus, unless new and compelling evidence is brought to the attention of the panel to warrant such a review
- to respond to general queries on AGPs, including queries on interpretation of guidance

1. Membership

The panel draws on the expertise of scientists and healthcare professionals, including clinicians, microbiologists, virologists, infection prevention and control, public health and engineering.

Members of the panel have collective responsibility for the operation of the panel. They should engage fully in the collective consideration of issues, taking account of the full range of relevant factors.

Appointments to the panel are made on merit and in accordance with the principles of the [Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees](#) (CoPSAC). The Chair and Members are appointed as individuals to fulfil the terms of reference of the panel, not as representatives of their particular profession, or of their employer or any interest group.

Members are appointed in the first instance for 1 year. Any renewal of appointments is subject to review by the Chair, in coordination with Secretariat.

The independent High Risk AGP panel members are expected to:

- follow the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (see [Annex 1](#));
- comply with the CoPSAC, and ensure that they understand their duties, rights and responsibilities, and that they are familiar with the functions and role of the Panel and any relevant statements of government policy;

Appointment to the High Risk AGP panel is on a voluntary basis and fees are not payable.

2. Role of the Chair

The Chair has particular responsibility for providing effective leadership on the issues within the remit of the panel. In addition, the Chair is responsible for ensuring that the minutes of meetings, produced by the Secretariat, and any recommendations made by panel accurately record the decisions taken and, where appropriate, the views of individual panel members have been taken into account.

3. Role of Deputy Chair

The Deputy Chair is responsible for chairing committee meetings and providing leadership if the Chair is unavoidably absent or when it is considered appropriate by the Chair.

4. Secretariat

The High Risk AGP panel is supported by a scientific secretariat from Public Health England (PHE).

The Secretariat functions include planning of meetings, ensuring these are run smoothly and effectively, contributing to the development of the panel's work plan under guidance from the Chair and panel members and ensuring that all members complete an annual declaration of interest form.

Communications between the panel and the 4 nations CMOs and any other stakeholder will generally be through the Secretariat.

5. Development of advice and recommendations

The Panel formulates advice and recommendations based on an assessment of the evidence submitted by each organisation with relation to a specific AGP and on the appraisal of the best scientific and other evidence available, at national and/or international level, reflecting current good practice and/or expert opinion. To ensure that the process involves a robust, transparent, and comprehensive appraisal, the panel may commission an external academic body to carry out a rapid review of the evidence with relation to the AGP under assessment.

The organisations that wish to submit evidence will need to contact the national COVID-19 UK IPC cell¹, which will forward to the panel only those requests that fall within the panel's remit. In requesting the panel's advice, the organisations are required to provide a review of the evidence to support their view or proposed classification.

Advice or recommendations are normally formulated during the course of meetings. Once agreed, these are communicated via the Secretariat to the UK 4 CMOs, the UK IPC Cell and cascaded by the cell through the system to the NHS England Medical Director, Public Health England and to the requesting body, as well as published on the panel's webpage on the UK government website.

¹ The Covid-19 IPC Cell supports the NHS England/Improvement Strategic Commander and Director for Covid19 response with subject matter expertise. The Cell is also a responsible part of the decision-making process that directs the NHS in executing a command role during the national management of Covid-19

The advice and recommendations will also be communicated to the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Clinical Research Network AGP research task and finish group, in order to ensure that AGP research gaps are being addressed in a timely fashion with robust, shared methodology and that emerging evidence can have a pathway to impact national guidance at pace.

The panel's advice and recommendations on a specific AGP are final and cannot be appealed against, unless there is new, substantial evidence that has been published since the initial submission.

6. Meetings

In view of the responsive role of the panel, most of its meetings will be scheduled on an ad hoc basis. However, an annual meeting can be convened if ad hoc meetings have not taken place or the panel has not received any submission, as required and at the Chair's discretion. The panel will be kept abreast of scientific progress and international evidence on AGPs in the intervening period.

7. Budget

The panel has no budget.

8. Declaration of Interests

It is important to avoid any danger of members of the High Risk AGP panel being influenced, or appearing to be influenced, by their private interests in the exercise of their public duties. All members should, therefore, declare any personal or business interests relevant to the work of the High Risk AGP panel which may, or may be perceived (by a reasonable member of the public) to influence their judgement.

Members are required to complete an annual declaration of interests form and communicate any change in status to the High Risk AGP panel Secretariat as soon as possible.

The Secretariat will record the members' declarations in the minutes of the first meeting of the High Risk AGP panel.

9. Confidentiality

The High Risk AGP panel's meetings are not open to the public. Procedures to provide strict confidentiality are required, although the panel aims to publish as soon as practicable its advice and recommendations. Members are asked to take particular care to avoid premature or selective disclosure of the panel's deliberations.

10. Communications with the media

Members of the High Risk AGP panel should not speak to the media as a member or voice of the panel. All enquiries from the press should be directed via the Secretariat to the Chair of the panel.

Members should inform the Chair and Secretariat of all relevant contacts with the media. Members may discuss issues with the media, in their personal capacity but should take care to explain that they are discussing it in an individual professional capacity and not as a member of the High Risk AGP panel or on behalf of it.

Members should not divulge information that is only available to the High Risk AGP panel including the outcome of discussions. In addition, the member will need to consider whether participation in such discussions could constitute an interest (for example a personal non-pecuniary interest) for the purpose of their declaration.

11. Publication scheme

The independent High Risk AGP panel must comply with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) which came into force on 1 January 2005. Certain information may be exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

The Panel is committed to making as much of its work open to public scrutiny as possible. However, often information discussed by the panel is not in the public domain and the default position is that the panel will meet in closed session. This allows members to have free and open debate before coming to any conclusions, which will be explained in minutes or statements when these are published.

12. Contacts

The Independent High Risk AGP Panel can be contacted at:

High Risk AGP Panel Secretariat, Public Health England, Wellington House,
133-155 Waterloo Road, London, SE1 8UG

e-mail: AGPpanel@phe.gov.uk

ANNEX 1 - THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

Selflessness

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for awards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interests clearly demands it.

Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interests. Leadership Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.