

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The variation in opinion on the use of PPE, together with general media misinformation, is causing unnecessary confusion and anxiety among our healthcare workers when it comes to the appropriate use of PPE.

The Monash Health PPE policy has been developed by an expert group. The guiding principle for this policy is that our employees' safety is of utmost importance and that we are aiming for zero health care worker infections.

The following is the latest and current credible advice for all Monash Health employees.

It is important to note that areas included in Tier One are likely to change over time

Important points

- Monash Health has four tiers of PPE (see below for details)
- Now is the time to make sure you are aware of how and when to use each of the PPE tiers:
 - **Complete** your PPE training - [daily training is available here](#)
 - **Watch** the video instruction of [how to apply PPE here](#)
 - **Read** the overview below
- These are our PPE standards and must be adhered to. It is unhelpful and wasteful to differ from these guidelines. It is also likely to create unnecessary anxiety among your co-workers

Overview of PPE and COVID-19

COVID-19 spreads via contact with droplets containing the virus. Aerosol protection is only required when an aerosol-generating procedure is occurring.

Healthcare employees must understand and apply the basics of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC). There is [good evidence](#) from China, Hong Kong, and Singapore that effective IPC can reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission to healthcare employees to almost nil.

For PPE to be effective, it must be applied and removed without the healthcare worker contaminating themselves. This is why it is so crucial for employees to be familiar with and be well trained in the application and removal of PPE.

Tier 0 - Surgical masks for all patient contact

Emergency Departments (ED), Non-COVID-19 Intensive Care Units (ICU)

- Standard surgical mask

To be used

- During routine care of patients in the Emergency Department

Tier 1 - Droplet and contact precautions

Acute Respiratory Assessment (Fever) clinics, Coronavirus (COVID-19) wards

- Standard surgical mask
- Protective eyewear (safety glasses/goggles)
- Long sleeve waterproof gown (yellow)
- Disposable non-sterile gloves

To be used

- Routine care of COVID-19 and suspected COVID-19 patients

Tier 2 - Airborne and contact precautions

- N95 mask
- Protective eyewear (safety glasses/goggles)
- Long sleeve waterproof gown (yellow)
- Disposable non-sterile gloves
- Disposable bouffant theatre cap (if hair cannot be contained off the face)

To be used

- Routine care of COVID-19 and suspected COVID-19 patients if an Aerosol-Generating Procedure (AGP) is performed
- When a history cannot be obtained – e.g., an unconscious person brought into ED

AGPs include:

- Bronchoscopy
- Gastroscopy
- Transoesophageal echocardiography
- Non-invasive ventilation (BiPAP, CPAP)
- High flow oxygen therapy (> 10 l /min)
- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- Sputum induction
- Women during the final stages of labour
- Suctioning
- Nebuliser use (although these are discouraged)
- Manipulating tracheostomies
- **Please note: taking a nasopharyngeal swab is not aerosol-generating**

Tier 3 - Airborne and contact precautions (High risk)

- N95 mask
- Eye protection (safety glasses/goggles)
- Face shield (additional for intubation/tracheostomies and high-risk surgery)
- Long sleeve waterproof gown (blue)
- Disposable gloves (sterile in theatre)
- Disposable bouffant theatre cap

To be used

- Within ICU in COVID-19 pods

- Anaesthetic/Airway team: throughout airway management
- High-risk surgery includes:
 - ENT surgery
 - Any other surgery involving the sinuses (Maxillofacial, Ophthalmology, and Neurosurgery) and plural surgery

Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is of utmost importance. PPE is ineffective on its own.

Frequent hand-cleaning (especially during the diffing process) with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water is required.

Surgical Mask Use

When wearing a mask, follow these steps:

- Before putting on a mask, clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- Cover mouth and nose with mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask.
- Avoid touching the mask while using it; if you do, you need to clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- Replace the mask with a new one as soon as it is damp or becomes soiled
- Remove masks when leaving the ward area and when going on breaks
- Do not drink or eat when wearing a mask (don't lift the mask or let it hang around the neck)
- To remove the mask: remove it from behind (do not touch the front of the mask); discard immediately in a closed bin; clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.