

NH Regional FAQs on Using Personal Protective Equipment During COVID-19 Response

There is a lot of information available from many sources worldwide, making it especially important for BC health authorities to continue to follow guidance from the BCCDC and work together under their consistent guidance.

This document was created to help answer questions because we know you want to stay informed and committed to protecting yourself, patients and colleagues with the most appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) available.

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What is direct patient care/direct care?

This means providing care

- Within two metres of a patient, OR
- In direct physical contact with a patient

What PPE should I wear if I'm providing patient care/direct care?

If you're providing direct patient care, you **should** put on safety goggles/glasses and a surgical/procedure mask at the start of your shift, and wear them for the duration of your shift.

Safety glasses are acceptable eyewear, with the exception of the highest-risk areas – ER, CCU, OR, COVID-19 cohorts – where you should use a full face shield or goggles.

At the end of your shift, please clean the safety goggles, safety glasses, or face shield that you used with Oxivir so other staff can use them.

When you're providing **direct patient care** to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients, you need to wear an isolation gown and gloves.

Regular surgical/procedure masks and [routine droplet precautions](#) provide appropriate protection against COVID-19.

Refer to the [Optimal Use of PPE poster](#) and the [List of PPE Required by Patient Care Area – Acute and Long-term Care](#).

The BC Centre for Disease Control has produced [posters on hand hygiene, donning and doffing PPE, and other topics](#).

What PPE should I wear if I'm not providing patient care/direct care?

If you are not providing direct patient care, you should **NOT** wear PPE. For instance, if you're delivering patient charts or delivering medications or supplies to a unit.

Remain more than two metres away from patients if not providing direct care.

Housekeeping and laundry staff wear their regular PPE.

If I'm cleaning a COVID-19 positive room and the patient is not there, what PPE are required?

Follow precautions on the room and refer to the [COVID-19 Cleaning Process](#).

What can I do before, during, and after work about my clothing, equipment, and food?

Refer to this [Tipsheet of Activities to do Before, During and After Work](#)

Questions about Masks

When should I wear a surgical mask? When can I take my mask off?

Don a surgical mask at the beginning of your shift, only changing the mask if it is too damp, soiled, or damaged for safe use or for a meal break. Masks should be removed at the start of a meal break and replaced with a new mask when the meal break is over. N95 masks are only required for aerosol generating procedures. If you work in acute or long-term care refer to [PPE Required by Patient Care Area – Acute and Long-term Care](#) (guidance for Primary and Community Care is coming soon).

What do I do with my mask when I go for a meal break?

Masks should be removed at the start of a meal break and replaced with a new mask when the meal break is over. Masks do not need to be removed to go to the bathroom.

Can I keep my mask around my neck or on top of my head?

No, but it can be moved (e.g., to take a drink) with proper hand hygiene.

How do I manage drinking fluids throughout my shift while wearing my surgical procedure mask?

Ensure that you are away from patients. Wash your hands, then move your mask, take a drink, reposition your mask, and wash your hands again.

Can I write my name or draw something on my mask so I know it is mine?

No. When the mask comes off it **should be disposed of**.

When do I need to use an N95 mask?

An N95 mask is only required for aerosol generating procedures. If you work in acute or long-term care refer to [PPE Required by Patient Care Area – Acute and Long-term Care](#) (guidance for Primary and Community Care is coming soon).

What is Northern Health's position on cloth masks?

Donations of cloth masks are being accepted by Northern Health but are not for staff use at this time.

Questions about Gowns

When should I wear an isolation gown?

You need to wear an isolation gown **only** when providing direct care to a patient who is on isolation precautions.

Note: Routine isolation precautions are not required for residents with positive ARO (Antibiotic Resistant Organisms); for example, MRSA or VRE. Exceptions:

- A new diagnosis
- ICU patients
- Patients with moderate bodily fluids contamination (does not include body fluids if related to a medication; e.g., diarrhea).

To ensure we are protecting staff, patients, and families, please follow this guidance and reduce the unnecessary use of isolation gowns.

How do I doff a gown and then don the same gown again safely?

Perform hand hygiene before and after donning. Paper and plastic gowns can be reused as long as they are not visibly soiled. Alternatives to paper or plastic gowns include patient gowns, disposable lab coats and disposable coveralls.

To remove a gown for reuse: while wearing clean gloves, carefully untie the gown and remove it by gently pulling forward at the sleeves. Hang the gown in an open area and avoid having the gown come in contact with other garments.

If I'm wearing the same gown all day, won't I contribute to possibly infecting patients?

Only cohorted units will implement extended gown use protocols.

Can I wear a gown to go into a MRSA or VRE room? What about CDiff rooms?

Routine isolation precautions are not required for residents with positive ARO (Antibiotic Resistant Organisms) with the following exceptions:

- A new diagnosis
- ICU patients
- Patients with moderate bodily fluids contamination (does not include body fluids if related to a medication; e.g., diarrhea).

Refer to [PPE Required by Patient Care Area – Acute and Long-term Care](#).

What if I am doing a lot of personal care and am worried I will get soiled with emesis/feces/urine/etc. – can I wear a gown?

Refer to the section: [What PPE should I wear if I'm providing patient care/direct care](#).

A gown is only donned when providing direct care to a patient who is on isolation precautions. Wear regular uniform, gloves, surgical mask and eye protection.

Questions about Eye Protection

Can I wear safety glasses instead of goggles?

If you are providing direct patient care, you should put on safety goggles/glasses and a surgical/procedure mask at the start of your shift, and wear them for the duration of your shift.

Safety glasses are acceptable eyewear with the exception of the highest-risk areas – ER, CCU, OR, COVID-19 cohorts – where you should use a full face shield or goggles.

How do I clean goggles/face shields for reuse?

At the end of your shift, please clean the safety goggles, safety glasses, or face shield that you used with Oxivir so other staff can use them.

Refer to the [Process for Cleaning and Disinfecting Eye Protection \(Goggles, Safety Glasses or Face Shields\)](#)

Can I place goggles up on my forehead or around my neck?

No, remove them and wipe with Oxivir if not using. Otherwise, continue to wear over the eyes.

When should I wear gloves?

- When providing direct patient care, wear gloves and change your gloves between patients.
 - To preserve stock of extended cuff examination gloves, refer to the [bulletin for correct selection of non-sterile examination gloves](#).
- When not providing direct patient care, practice proper hand hygiene rather than wearing gloves.
- If you are dealing with body fluids, wear gloves for routine practices, and change them between patients.
- Regular care does not require double gloving and is discouraged unless indicated by your safe work practices or policy (e.g., hazardous drug program, OR for some surgical procedures)
- Examples of situations where gloves should not be worn include:
 - After registering a patient - wash hands instead
 - After delivering meal trays – wash hands instead
 - Unit Clerks working at the desk

Should head and neck covers be worn for aerosol generating procedures?

No. Head and neck covers are not required for Aerosol Generating Medical Procedures (AGMP). This direction is consistent with the province and BCCDC based on research and reasonable practice. The rationale is that the neck can be washed if required and it cannot be reached with another mucous membrane (e.g., mouth).

When should I reuse PPE? How often do I change PPE?

- Don a mask at the beginning of your shift, only changing the mask if it is too damp, soiled, or damaged for safe use. Masks should be removed at the start of a meal break and replaced with a new mask when the meal break is over.

- Use the same piece of eye protection (e.g., eye goggles or face shield) throughout your shift, with appropriate cleaning protocols at shift end. Refer to the [Housekeeping Process for Cleaning and Disinfecting Eye Protection \(Goggles, Safety Glasses or Face Shields\)](#)
- Face shields should be cleaned, not disposed of, with the exception of face shields with a mask attached.
- If there are not enough goggles or face shields, use safety glasses. Safety glasses are adequate without a face shield, unless you're involved in an aerosol-generating medical procedure
- If working on a COVID-19 ward with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients, your mask, gown and eye protection do not need to be changed between every patient. Gloves should be changed between patients.

What PPE do I wear when transporting patients?

Staff who transport patients are considered as being within two metres / six feet of the patient. Ensure patients with respiratory symptoms are wearing a mask.

When transporting a patient without respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, eye protection, and gloves.

When transporting a COVID-19 patient wear full PPE including gown.

This does not include staff who are intermittently walking by a patient who is being transported.

What PPE should I wear when manipulating specimens?

Lab staff should follow current processes in place, as they adequately cover the PPE requirements.

If a service provider is coming into my unit/department where do they get PPE? (e.g., Maintenance, IT, students)

If the person will be accessing areas that require PPE then the PPE will be supplied by the site. Once it is clear whether PPE is required and what type of PPE is required then it will be issued from the floor.

To protect staff and patients, it is vital for us all to focus on the basics:

- Good hand hygiene
- Coughing/sneezing into your sleeve or into a tissue
- If you have respiratory symptoms, do not come to work

Thank you for all you do every day to keep Northerners safe and healthy