

Pacific-Adapted Guidance on Rational Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Date: 23 April 2020



Objective of the guidance note

To support Pacific Island Countries and Territories in effectively managing supply and use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Background

Safe use of PPE is important to protect healthcare workers

The COVID-19 virus is a respiratory disease that is transmitted via droplets, through close contacts of infected individuals and bodily fluids during coughing, sneezing and speaking. Therefore, droplet, contact, and standard infection prevention and control measures are recommended to prevent transmission.

There is a global shortage of PPE

The current shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), particularly N95 masks and surgical masks, will have a significant impact on the ability of healthcare workers to safely manage patients.

Current stock of PPE can be extended if used rationally

Ministries of Health can take actions to ensure that current stocks can cover as many patients as possible. It is vital that all Pacific Island Countries implement guidelines on rational use of PPE, including extended use, so that adequate supplies are available during times of peak demand. For example, a respirator mask (N95, FFP2, FFP3, or equivalent) is only used if performing aerosol generating procedures.

Institute a strong PPE supply management

Ensure a system to monitor and control PPE requests. For example, require that all requests for PPE are coordinated via your Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) and central medical supplies team.

Key actions for rational use of PPE

Reinforce and maintain advice to the public on hygiene and social distancing rather than use of masks and gloves by the public

- Prevent community transmission of COVID-19 at the community level, performing frequent hand hygiene, avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth, practicing respiratory hygiene by coughing or sneezing into a bent elbow or tissue and then immediately disposing of the tissue and maintaining physical distance by 1 meter.
- For persons without symptoms, wearing a mask of any type is not recommended. Wearing medical masks when they are not indicated may cause unnecessary cost and a procurement burden and create a false sense of security that can lead to the neglect of other essential preventive measures.

Adopt strategies to optimise the use of available PPE

- Minimise the need for PPE by restricting health care workers from entering the rooms of COVID-19 patients if they are not involved in direct care.
- Aggregate a few activities in a written plan and completed them together to minimize the number of times the patient room is entered (e.g. check vital signs during medication administration or have food delivered by health care workers while they are performing other care).
- Do not allow visitors into patient's room so that need for PPE for visitors is removed.
- Prioritize the use of N95 respirators only for use by staff when undertaking procedures that generate high aerosols such as suction, bronchoscopy, and intubation etc. or when caring for patients that are experiencing complications of infection.
- If supplies of gowns are limited, gown use should be prioritized for aerosol-generating procedures and for activities that involve holding the patient close (e.g. in paediatric settings) or when other extensive body-to-body surface contact is anticipated. Gowns may also be worn in the care of more than one patient in a cohort area if there is no direct contact between the gown and the patients.
- If plastic aprons are available, they can be used in situations where risks of body fluid spill are not high.
- When no gowns and masks are available consider reusable cloth gowns and masks.
- There is no evidence that a home-made mask will protect from COVID-19 or other respiratory illness. However, if masks are sewn ensure it is easy to breathe through and replace it if it gets moist, ensure appropriate laundering in the case of cloth gowns and mask.

IF I AM A....	WHAT PPE DO I NEED?
Nurse or Doctor who IS NOT looking after a COVID-19 patient.	None. Standard precautions, no additional masks or gowns or eye protection required unless you think you are at risk of a body fluid exposures.
Nurse or Doctor providing direct care in an isolation or quarantine facility. I am often less than 1m away from patient or with patients for over 15 minutes.	Gloves, gown, eye protection, surgical mask, and closed in shoes.
Doctor or Nurse performing intubation or giving nebuliser.	N95 mask, gloves, gown, eye protection, and closed in shoes.
Part of the case investigation or screening team assessing patients.	Gloves, gown, eye wear, surgical mask, and closed in shoes.
Driver of case investigation team or AMBULANCE with no direct patient contact.	Surgical mask.
Health care worker who enters a room with COVID-19 patient but stay over 1m from the patient with no contact.	Surgical mask and gloves.
Support worker in engineering, pharmacy or supply etc.	None. Practice hand hygiene and stay >1m away from people.
Office worker	None. Practice hand hygiene and stay >1m away from people
Security directing traffic or people.	None. Practice hand hygiene and stay >1m away from people.
Cleaner in isolation, quarantine, or screening area.	Gloves, gown, eye protection, surgical mask, and closed in shoes.
Cleaner working in any other that IS NOT listed above,	Gloves, apron, closed in shoes, eye protection for chemicals.
Waste collection person handling clinical or general waste.	Gloves, gown, eye protection, surgical mask, and closed in shoes.
Mortuary worker when handling dead body.	Gloves, gown, eye protection, surgical mask, and closed in shoes.
Nurse looking after a patient with TB or MRSA.	Follow normal PPE for airborne and contact transmission.
Microbiology technician.	Gloves, gown, eye wear, surgical mask and closed in shoes.
Community member who has NO symptoms but is worried.	None. Masks are not recommended for well people. Practice hand hygiene and stay >1m away from people when possible.

Patient with fever, cough, short of breath, sore throat or body aches and pains.	Surgical mask immediately. These are symptoms of COVID-19. Isolate and call for case investigation team.
Patient with no symptoms.	None, encourage hand hygiene & cough into elbow area.
Carer/essential visitor who cares for COVID-19 patient.	Glove, mask, apron if splash. Encourage hand hygiene and limit contact with other patients.
Worker at the airport or port unloading stuff.	None. Follow normal safety processes.
Customs worker at airport screening incoming passengers.	Surgical mask, practice hand hygiene and stay >1m away from people when possible.
Worker at a shop or petrol station or I want to go to the shop or sport ground etc.	None. Practice hand hygiene and stay >1m away from people when possible.

References

Information from WHO COVID-19 and Dept Health Australia publications 2020

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331498/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPCPPE-use-2020.2-eng.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/isolation-gowns.html>

This document has been developed in accordance with global guidance and contextualized to the Pacific context by Pacific Community the from the COVID-19 Pacific Joint Incident Management Team.