

## COVID-19 Guidance on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Employers

It is important to monitor the public health guidance from the Department of Health and Community Services as the situation can change quickly. Please check [www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19](http://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19), which is updated daily.

There is currently a global shortage of PPE that is affecting the healthcare system. N95 respirators, surgical/procedure masks, protective eye wear/face shields, gloves, and gowns are critical PPE required to protect healthcare workers.

Employers who have created PPE policies specifically to protect employees from the COVID-19 virus are encouraged to re-examine these policies to ensure valuable PPE resources are not unnecessarily diverted from the healthcare system. Please note this is not intended to change established PPE requirements for an employee's day-to-day work activities.

Employers and staff should adhere to the basic requirements of frequent handwashing, physical distancing and staying home when ill.

### **PPE use in the healthcare system**

There are extensive PPE requirements for employees in the health care system. The appropriate use of PPE to protect against the COVID-19 virus is based on established infection prevention and control measures. PPE requirements based on droplet and contact precautions include:

- Gloves, a long-sleeved gown, procedure/surgical mask, and facial/eye protection when entering a patient room and in close contact with a COVID-19 patient. These items must be removed after leaving the room.
- Gloves, long-sleeved gown, an N95 respirator, and facial/eye protection when in direct contact with a COVID-19 patient and an aerosol generating medical procedure is performed that could result in fluid from the patient's respiratory system becoming airborne (e.g., intubation, CPR).
- Proper hand hygiene, including washing with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 per cent alcohol when hands are not visibly soiled.
- Masks and other disposable PPE can be discarded into a plastic-lined garbage container.

### **What are some non-health care occupations that may require PPE to protect against COVID-19?**

Occupations that require workers to come into close contact (less than two metres) with people known or suspected of having the COVID-19 need to take extra precautions. This includes:

- First responders (e.g., police and fire officials);
- Corrections officials;
- Group home and personal care home workers responsible for resident care;
- Funeral home staff;
- Public health officials; and,
- Personal care services workers.

### **What should I do as an employer to ensure my employees are protected?**

Most workers will not require PPE for protection against the COVID-19 virus unless they are in situations similar to health care workers.

Non-PPE controls should be put into place by employers as often as possible. Different workplaces will have different needs, but the following steps are a good start:

- Have a system in place where workers (including Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Committee or an OHS representative) can inform you of concerns relating to being exposed to COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Do a walk-through of your workplace to identify specific conditions or tasks that may increase the risk of exposure of your workers to COVID-19.
- Ask employees (including your OHS committee or an OHS representative) where potential exposures may occur and how they think exposures can be controlled.
- If not necessary at this time, delay tasks that require PPE.
- It is preferable to have employees work from home, if possible. Only those who are needed to be physically present should come into the workplace.
- If possible, stagger shifts to reduce the numbers present at one time.
- Prioritize the work that needs to be done to help your business operate as close to normal under the circumstances. This will require a determination of core work and where it can safely and productively be performed.
- Workplaces may have physical barriers in place (e.g., drive through windows for customer service).
- Position workers to allow for physical distancing. Keep two metres (or two arm's lengths) between workers, as well as your customers.
- Provide soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 per cent alcohol, and encourage workers to wash their hands frequently.
- Enhance cleaning and disinfecting of the workplace, particularly high-contact items such as door handles, faucets, keyboards, and shared equipment (e.g., photocopiers). The following link provides information on cleaning and disinfecting: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning-NL.pdf>.
- Ensure there is adequate cleaning and disinfecting between shifts.