

Using Personal Protective Equipment

Wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is an essential risk management duty for healthcare workers in direct patient care to protect themselves, the patients, and others. PPE helps safeguard healthcare workers from potentially infectious patients and materials, toxic medications, and other potentially dangerous substances used in healthcare settings.

When used properly and with other infection control practices, PPE minimizes the spread of infection by acting as a barrier between infectious materials (such as blood, body fluids, and respiratory secretions) and an individual's skin and mucous membranes. PPE may also protect patients — particularly those who are at high risk for contracting infections through a

surgical procedure or who have a medical condition, such as an immunodeficiency — from being exposed to substances or potentially infectious material brought in by visitors and healthcare workers.¹

Healthcare workers should use PPE only once and properly remove and dispose of it to prevent exposing the wearer and others to infection. (Note: PPE shortages may require contingent and crisis strategies to manage.)

Using or wearing PPE improperly may present serious health risks to healthcare workers and patients as well as potentially expose the healthcare organization to liability. The following risk tips provide guidance and additional resources on using PPE.

1

Develop and implement a written infection prevention and control (IPC) program that includes respiratory protection. Specify who leads the program (e.g., an infection preventionist) in the plan.

2

Include guidance in the IPC program on standard operating procedures; the selection, maintenance, and use of PPE; the training of employees; fit testing; and monitoring.

3

Provide sufficient and appropriate PPE for staff members, including protective clothing, helmets, eye protection, isolation gowns, gloves, face shields, face masks, and respiratory devices (including, as appropriate, N95 respirators, powered air purifying respirators, elastomeric respirators, and ventilators).

4

Provide National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)-approved respirators for use in your facility. Be sure to verify NIOSH markings to avoid counterfeit pieces.* Inspect and maintain respirators according to manufacturer instructions. For more information, consult MedPro's [Medical Equipment Management](#) guideline.

5

Ensure healthcare workers are wearing PPE correctly, and that it remains in place while they are working in potentially contaminated areas. Healthcare workers should not adjust PPE (e.g., retying a gown or adjusting a respirator/face mask) during patient care.

6

Train healthcare workers on how to use the proper PPE and have them practice doing so. See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance on properly [donning and doffing PPE](#). Ensure healthcare workers are removing PPE slowly and deliberately in a sequence that prevents self-contamination.

* NIOSH is the government agency responsible for the certification and approval of respiratory protective devices for occupational use. Search its [Certified Equipment List](#) here.

7

Remove PPE promptly using proper removal and disposal procedures if it is exposed to infectious materials during use (e.g., body fluids from an infected person).

8

In the event of a critical PPE shortage, check CDC's guidance on [Conserving Supplies of Personal Protective Equipment in Healthcare Facilities during Shortages](#). Contact local health authorities to obtain assistance and possibly direction to the appropriate state-specific contact who controls the state's strategic stockpile.[†]

9

Consider using alternative products in emergency circumstances that require PPE conservation, such as powered air purifying respirators (PAPRs) in place of N95 respirators and eye protection or revising how PPE will be used. Determine whether alternate gowns should be used (if necessary) to protect staff or sterile procedures. Do these steps in conjunction with the implementation of facility emergency management procedures.

Resources

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Isolation Precautions Guideline](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Personal Protective Equipment](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Standard Precautions for All Patient Care](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Strategies for Optimizing the Supply of N95 Respirators](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Tuberculosis Infection Control](#)

[†] The [Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response](#) manages the strategic national stockpile, which supplements and resupplies state and local inventories of medications and supplies during emergencies that are severe enough to exhaust local supplies.

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- [Chemical Hazards Emergency Medical Management, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#)
 - [Food and Drug Administration: N95 Respirators, Surgical Masks, Face Masks, and Barrier Face Coverings](#)
 - [Food and Drug Administration: Personal Protective Equipment for Infection Control](#)
 - [National Emerging Special Pathogens Training & Education Center: Know Your PPE: The Must-Have Resource for Healthcare Professionals Caring for Special Pathogen Patients](#)
 - [Occupational Safety and Health Administration: Personal Protective Equipment Overview](#)

Endnote

¹ U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2020, February 10). *Personal protective equipment for infection control*. Retrieved from www.fda.gov/medical-devices/general-hospital-devices-and-supplies/personal-protective-equipment-infection-control

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