

Q&A: Personal Protective Equipment

Last Updated: 11:15AM, Friday, March 20, 2020.

What is the recommendation on PPE requirements for healthcare workers?

At present, there is no consensus from leading public health and disease control institutions across the globe on modes of transmission for COVID-19 and minimum PPE requirements for front-line health care workers. In light of this uncertainty, NBNU and CFNU believe that all front-line health care workers should have access to, and at minimum be protected using a fit-tested NIOSH-approved N95 respirator **when in contact with patients who are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19.**

NBNU's recommendation on minimum PPE requirements is based on [CFNU's position statement](#) and is in line with other leading institutions, including both the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the European Centre for Disease Control in Prevention, which both recommend an N95 respirator for health care workers in contact with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19.

We acknowledge that these recommendations differ from both the World Health Organization and Public Health Agency of Canada; however, because of the conflicting opinions on PPE from leading public health institutions and uncertainty around transmission, we must practice the precautionary principle and recommend the higher standard.

2. It appears the CDC in the US have recently softened their position on PPE because of supply chain issues; however, they recommend returning to the use of respirators once the supply chain is restored.

In its most recent update on COVID-19, the US CDC notes that the science remains uncertain on how the virus is transmitted: "*Droplets can land in the mouths, noses, or eyes of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs of those within close proximity. The contribution of small respirable particles, sometimes called aerosols or droplet nuclei, to close-proximity transmission is currently uncertain.*"

On March 12, 2020, the European CDC also released updated guidelines for Infection prevention and control for COVID-19 in healthcare settings. In their guidelines they also raise uncertainty around transmission stating, "*based on current knowledge on the transmission of COVID-19, in which respiratory droplets seem to play a major role (although airborne transmission cannot be ruled out at this stage).*" They acknowledge that the suggested set of PPE for droplet, contact, and airborne transmission (gloves, goggles, gown and FFP2/FFP3 respirator) could be adapted for the clinical assessment of suspected cases", which may include use of a surgical mask in certain situations, because of supply chain concerns.

However, both the US CDC and European CDC both continue to recommend use of an N95 (or equivalent FFP2 or higher FFP3 respirator) as minimum PPE when collecting a NP swab from a suspected COVID-19 case.

In summary, the recent changes in both of these guidelines appear to be driven solely by supply chain concerns; however, both guidelines continue to imply that N95 (or equivalent FFP2 or higher FFP3) is the preferred PPE for healthcare workers in contact with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 and are a must when collecting NP swabs from suspected cases.

3. What should I do if I can't access or I am denied using PPE?

- Have a discussion with your immediate supervisor/manager outlining your concerns.
- If you are still unable to access or are denied using the minimum PPE that is advised for suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19, we strongly encourage you to consider exercising your right to refuse dangerous work.
- NBNU will support any member that chooses to exercise their right to refuse dangerous work, provided there are proper grounds for refusal.

Please contact your Local President, Labour Relations Officer (LRO) or NBNU Provincial Office:
Phone: 1-800-442-4914; **Email:** info@nbnu.ca for questions or support.

As the situation with COVID-19 evolves, the viability of our healthcare system is important, but not at the expense of your own health and safety. The safety of our members is NBNU's upmost priority and must be taken seriously by all employers.

Stay Safe!

In Solidarity,
Paula Doucet, RN
President