

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated April 13: A new question was added on page 1 about what to do if patients come into our facilities wearing winter or disposable gloves; a question about re-using N95s for multiple patients was updated on page 4; a new question was added on page 5 with information about 8210 N95s.

Q: Why do PPE guidelines keep changing?

A: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and other agencies have been working hard to incorporate the latest science into their guidance, especially in the face of national shortages of supplies. NM will continue to provide you with the most current national guidance regarding PPE. Our aim is to keep the workforce and our patients safe, and to ensure the supply of PPE for the weeks and months ahead.

Q: What is universal masking and why did NM implement this change?

A: Universal masking helps to keep our patients, employees, physicians and visitors safe. Many people with COVID-19 may be symptom free. Masking helps limit exposure and transmission to protect our colleagues and communities.

NEW Q: What information should I provide to patients who are entering NM facilities wearing either winter or disposable gloves?

A: Please request that they remove their gloves and wash or sanitize their hands to help keep our clinical environment safe. Wearing gloves in public is not a substitute for washing your hands, and according to the CDC, contamination during glove removal is common. Instead of wearing gloves, the CDC recommends that individuals practice good hand hygiene with either soap and water or a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Q: Can I take PPE home for personal use?

A: PPE that has been used in patient care should not be taken home. The universal mask that you wear around campus may be taken home and re-used the next day at work. The mask should be stored in a clean paper bag until returning to work. All other PPE such as gloves, gowns, respirators and all other supplies are reserved for the use of our staff in caring for patients. With the exception of the universal mask, PPE and other supplies should not be removed from any NM Facility.

Q: What PPE should I use for suspect/confirmed COVID-19 patients?

A: Please review guidance available on [PPE Resources](#).

Q: What PPE should I use when transporting a COVID-19 positive patient?

A: Consistent with the universal masking policy across NM's clinical areas, staff should wear a mask when transporting any patients, including those who are confirmed with COVID-19. Staff do not need to don an N95 when transporting a patient, unless they already have one on from a prior procedure that required an N95 mask.

Masks

Q: Who should wear a mask?

A: All staff should wear a mask when entering a clinical NM building including hospitals and ambulatory outpatient sites. This includes staff involved in both direct patient care and non-patient-care-related activities. Staff working in non-clinical or administrative buildings should practice social distancing so that a mask is not needed. Refer to [Clinical Tips for Universal Masking](#).

A mask does not need to be worn in the following circumstances:

- Walking outside NM hospitals or clinical buildings.
- Spaces where social distancing can be maintained such as eating in a designated area or in a private office.
- While working in non-clinical buildings.

Q: Should patients and visitors wear a mask?

A: Yes. All patients and visitors, regardless of whether they have symptoms, should be asked to wear a mask, as tolerated, when entering a clinical NM facility. Inpatients only need to wear a mask when leaving their rooms as staff providing care wear appropriate PPE while in a patient room. An inpatient's mask may be placed in a labeled paper bag and stored inside their room when not in use. If a patient refuses to wear a mask please consult with the patient's physician or with local medical or operating leadership.

Q: Can patients wear their own homemade masks?

A: Patients should be offered an NM-issued mask, which should be worn at all times inside an NM clinical facility. However, a patient should be allowed to wear their own cloth or homemade mask if they prefer.

Q: Do pediatric patients, including infants, need to be masked?

A: According to CDC guidelines, children younger than 2 years of age should not wear a cloth face covering due to concerns that they might suffocate. Any child older than 2 years of age should wear a mask, as tolerated.

Q: What type of mask should I wear?

A: Staff should wear an NM provided earloop or surgical tie mask at all times in clinical buildings (NOTE: The use of an N95 respirator used for designated patient care tasks will supersede the use of an earloop or surgical tie mask). See [PPE policy](#).

Q: How do I put on and wear the mask?

A: First, perform hand hygiene with alcohol gel or soap and water then apply the mask. Hook the earloops or tie the ties and place the metal wire over your nose and pinch for a good fit. The mask should never be worn below your mouth or chin, around your neck or on your forehead. Prior to removing a mask, perform hand hygiene with alcohol gel or soap. Perform the same hand hygiene prior to placing the mask on your face again.

Q: How long can I wear the same mask?

A: Staff who are part of the universal masking expansion and who don't usually wear a mask, should continuously wear the same NM-issued mask throughout their entire shift, reusing it daily until it

becomes unserviceable. When not in use or upon departing from an NM clinical facility, the mask should be stored in a paper bag.

Certain roles may need to replace their NM-issued mask more frequently. Replace your mask when it is soiled, torn or difficult to breathe through. Bedside clinical teams and others in direct patient care roles should continue to refer to current PPE guidelines and may need to replace masks each day.

Q: Where can I get a replacement when my NM-provided mask is no longer wearable?

A: Masks will be stocked as usual in the clinical department supply rooms. Staff not working in a clinical area will be able to get a new mask at the employee screening area.

Q: Is it safe for me to bring home the NM-provided mask?

A: Yes. If the mask is stored in a paper bag using proper technique and hand hygiene the risk of exposure from touching the bag is minimal. If you choose to leave your NM-provided mask at work, you will need to wear a personal mask to cover your nose and mouth as you enter and exit NM clinical buildings.

Q: Can I wear the same mask into multiple exam or patient rooms?

A: Yes, staff may wear one mask continuously. Once in place, you should avoid touching the mask. Perform appropriate hand hygiene if you touch the mask.

Q: Can I use a mask in an isolation room?

A: A surgical tie or earloop mask should be worn for all patients on contact, droplet and standard precautions. Please reference the FAQ's on airborne isolation/N95 usage for additional guidance.

Q: When caring for a patient in contact precautions, when do I dispose of my mask?

A: You may continuously wear your procedure mask until soiled, torn, or difficult to breathe through. If you use a face shield as your eye protection, this may help to protect the mask. Refer to [Guidelines for Re-Use of PPE](#).

Q: I am wearing a procedure masks continuously while caring for patients with droplet precautions or no precautions. What should I do when I enter a room with an airborne isolation sign, where an N95 respirator is required?

A: When going into a room where an N95 is required, remove the procedure mask and store it in your labeled paper bag. Don an N95 respirator prior to entering the room. You may wear the N95 continuously if you have a need for it. After exiting the patient room, remove the N95 and store it in a separate paper bag, perform hand hygiene and re-don the mask that you stored in its own paper bag. Please take care when removing and re-using your procedure mask and N95. Please refer to [Guidelines for Re-Use of PPE](#) and refer to [videos on Physician Forum](#).

Q: When should I discard the mask?

A: The mask should be discarded if it is soiled, difficult to breathe in, too wet to wear comfortably, torn or otherwise damaged.

Q: Can I wear my own personal mask from home?

A: At this time, we have enough inventory to provide all physicians and staff with appropriate PPE. As

such, we recommend that all staff use NM-issued masks in all environments. We are **requiring** the use of NM-provided PPE in clinical areas. Cloth or homemade masks are **not** considered PPE and should not be worn over NM-issued PPE.

Clinical Areas: Staff working in a patient care setting such as an inpatient unit, hospital outpatient department or ambulatory clinic **must** wear NM-issued PPE and follow **NM PPE Guidelines**. Staff working in these environments may choose to wear a cloth or homemade mask when entering an NM clinical facility and traveling to their department. Staff may choose to store their personal PPE in a labeled paper bag in a clean, designated location within their department between shifts.

Non-Clinical Areas: Staff working outside of a clinical area are encouraged to wear NM-issued PPE, but may choose to wear a cloth or homemade mask in situations where **NM PPE Guidelines** do not apply.

Q: Should I wear a mask in public or when taking public transit?

A: On Friday, April 3, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued guidance suggesting that the public should consider wearing a cloth mask or face covering to reduce the possibility of transmission of COVID-19 by asymptomatic people. See <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>. The CDC notes that medical masks and respirators should be reserved for the protection of patients and staff, and are not to be worn outside.

N95 Respirator

Q: When should I wear an N95 respirator?

A: If the patient is on airborne isolation or requires an aerosol-generating procedure, an N95 respirator or PAPR hood should be worn. Perform a seal check when donning or if the N95 seems loose. In dedicated COVID-19 intensive care units, staff may wear the N95 continuously for care of multiple patients. An N95 respirator does not need to be worn outside of these clinical circumstances. See also detailed **PPE guidance**.

UPDATE Q: Can I use the N95 respirator for multiple patients? When should I discard it?

A: You may continue to wear and re-use your N95 respirator when providing **routine care in an ICU** as long as it is not soiled, torn or difficult to breathe through. You should discard your N95 respirator in the following scenarios:

- After wearing it during an **aerosol-generating procedure**, even if a full-face shield is worn
- When it becomes contaminated with blood, nasal or respiratory secretions or other bodily fluids
- If it fails the seal test, tears or breaks
- If it becomes hard to breathe through

Q: Should I cover the N95 respirator with a surgical mask?

A: No, there is no need to cover the N95 respirator. A face shield is preferred, as it provides eye protection and may reduce contamination of the respirator.

Q: Has there been suspension of N95 fit testing?

A: Because of the national shortage of N95 respirators, NM has an increasingly diverse range of types and models. As a result, we have temporarily suspended fit testing. Always perform a seal test when you don your N95 respirator. Refer to the N95 tip sheet and videos at **N95 Respirator Seal Check**.

NEW Q: What should I do if I'm experiencing difficulty wearing the 8210 N95 respirator?

A: Several employees have experienced difficulty in ensuring a proper fit with the 8210 respirator after a seal check. As a reminder, these are industrial respirators and are permeable, which require additional PPE in order to be effective within a healthcare setting, such as wearing a face shield in addition to the mask. If you experience fit issues, please contact Corporate Health.

Q: What if I want to wear my own N95 respirator?

A: At this time, we have enough inventory to provide all physicians and staff with appropriate PPE. As such, we recommend that all staff use NM-issued PPE in all environments and are requiring use of NM-provided PPE in clinical areas. You may wear your own equipment, and in particular your own N95 respirator, when NM is not requiring such equipment. In this instance, you must mark the mask with the words "PERSONAL" in a clearly visible manner. The personal mask must be removed and replaced with the NM-issued PPE prior to entering a patient room or providing patient care.

PAPR

Q: When should I wear a Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR) instead of an N95 respirator?

A: PAPRs are to be used by individuals when they are unable to wear an N95. PAPR use is limited to individuals who:

- Perform aerosolizing procedures such as: bronchoscopy, sputum induction, endotracheal intubation or extubation, open suctioning of airways, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, TEE, labor and delivery or autopsies.
- Cannot properly wear an N95 mask due to facial reconstruction, extreme weight loss/gain, braces or dentures.

Q: Can I wear a PAPR if I have facial hair?

A: Individuals will not be given a PAPR because they have facial hair. The limited number of PAPRs will be prioritized based on an individual meeting the established criteria. Facial hair should be shaved in order to fit an N95. Employees who wish to request a religious exemption from shaving should inform their managers or Human Resources to follow the exemption-request process.

Q: How long can PAPR hoods be used?

A: As a conservation measure, PAPR hoods may be worn continuously by the same healthcare worker for multiple patients up to multiple shifts.

- Staff should write their name on the PAPR hood and store it in the anteroom between uses. Departments should ensure a marker is available to write names.
- Outside of the PAPR hood must be cleaned between every use with a disinfectant wipe (sani-cloth, bleach wipe).

Q: What is my region-specific process for checking out a PAPR?

A: For region specific PAPR details, please review policy titled Respiratory Protection Program (NMHC HS 04.0210) and refer to the related document titled "Process for Obtaining a PAPR."

Gown

Q: When should I wear a gown?

A: Follow the isolation sign on patient door, which outlines contact precautions requiring gown use.

Q: Should I re-use an isolation gown for multiple patients?

A: At this time, isolation gowns are single-use and discarded after each patient's care.

Face Shield or Goggles

Q: When should I wear a face shield?

A: A face shield or goggles should be worn if the isolation sign indicates eye protection or whenever a body fluid splash is expected. A face shield may be preferred rather than goggles for visibility, comfort and ease of use. A full-face shield also provides some protection to the mask from contamination.

Q: How do I safely reuse a face shield or goggles?

A:

- A face shield or goggles may be worn throughout your shift between different patients. Take care not to touch your face shield or goggles. Appropriate hand hygiene must be performed if you do.
- Your face shield or goggles must be cleaned when visibly soiled and at the end of your shift.
- To clean your face shield or goggles: While wearing gloves, carefully wipe the inside, followed by the outside of the face shield or goggles using a hospital disinfectant wipe. Allow the item to fully dry, remove gloves and perform hand hygiene.