

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in Healthcare Workers and Patients

Introduction

The rise in transmission of COVID-19 in hospital workers has demonstrated the need for refocusing, clarification and guidance regarding prevention measures. This Hazard Alert from the Washington State Departments of Labor & Industries (L&I) and Health (DOH) provides key areas for focus by hospital employers and health care workers.

The L&I Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) requires hospitals to follow [Governor's Proclamation 20-24.1](#), along with L&I rules on [respiratory protection](#) and [personal protective equipment](#) (PPE). Hospitals must also abide by [OSHA PPE and respirator practices](#) for healthcare delivery. For other employees and operations, [general L&I employer requirements](#) must be followed.

Supplies of respirators and other personal protective equipment must be provided at no cost to employees. Employers that do not consider their PPE or respiratory protection supplies adequate to meet these expectations must contact their suppliers and local county emergency management to resolve supply issues.

Employee training on COVID-19 procedures, respirator procedures, infection control

- Prior to working at a facility, ALL staff must be trained on your site-specific COVID-19 procedures, infection control procedures, how to report a potential COVID-19 exposure, and how to don and doff masks, respirators, and other personal protective equipment safely.
- Employers must train and ensure sick employees do not report to work and immediately leave work when they become symptomatic.
- Employers must display COVID-19 prevention educational posters for employees.

Social distancing

- Require and ensure social distancing by ALL employees in ALL areas of the hospital/clinic including public areas, halls, office areas, breakrooms and cafeteria.
- Ensure staff maintain six feet of distance from coworkers at all times outside of direct patient care, and from patients and other hospital visitors to the extent allowed by treatment. Any staff task work within six feet of others must be addressed in the Infection Control Plan and PPE assessments.
- COVID-19 positive and COVID-19 suspect patients must be physically isolated from non-infected persons.
- Rooms of suspect and COVID-19 positive patients shall be easily identifiable until at least they are no longer considered a hazard to others. Hospitals should follow the recommended duration in the [Interim Guidance for Discontinuation of Transmission-Based Precautions and Disposition of Hospitalized Patients with COVID-19](#).

Respirator program requirement highlights

- Disposable respirators and procedural masks must be replaced daily at the beginning of each shift for every employee and immediately upon employee request when soiled or damaged during the shift. Multiple shift use of disposable respirators/masks is NOT allowed.
- Employees who enter the room of a patient with a suspected or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection must follow [Standard Precautions](#) and use a NIOSH-approved N95 or equivalent or higher-level respirator, gown, gloves, and eye protection. When an appropriate respirator is not available in the facility and cannot be reasonably obtained, a face shield and an approved face mask may be used by employees, but only if there has not been an aerosolization procedure performed within the last hour.
- Hospital respirator procedures must ensure that all respirator users are medically cleared, fit tested



and trained; training must include storage, when to change N95s or filters, and how to inspect and maintain PAPRs/CAPRs consistent with manufacturer's instructions.

- PAPRs/CAPRs may only be used if they are within manufacturer's acceptable conditions.
- Hospitals must develop and implement an effective system to track N95/PAPR/CAPR training and testing that ensures every employee is supplied with appropriate respiratory protection.
- Staff must be provided a safe place to don and doff PPE prior to entering spaces where facemasks must be removed for eating and drinking. Staff should don a new facemask prior to returning to the unit.

Implement deep cleaning/disinfection procedures after confirmed COVID-19 case(s)

- Hospitals must close off all areas (outside a COVID ward or isolation wing area) where a COVID-19 positive employee worked or was present until the area is cleaned and disinfected, including bathrooms, break rooms, cafeteria, locker and storage rooms.
- Hospitals must follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for "[Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)" after confirmed COVID-19 cases.
- Employees performing cleaning/disinfection must be trained in the chemicals used and provided appropriate PPE for those hazards.

Infection control

Hospitals are required to:

- Implement and maintain a comprehensive **infection control program** that is adequately staffed with qualified infection prevention staff and resources; develop and update hospital-wide policies and procedures consistent with DOSH, DOH, CMS, and CDC requirements and guidelines, especially as they evolve for COVID-19;
- Provide adequate space and procedures for staff to physically distance at a minimum of six feet in break rooms, nurse stations, cafeteria and other places where staff congregate;
- Prohibit staff from working or being on the premises if exposed to COVID-19, and all staff who test positive must be excluded from work and isolated according to CDC guidelines;
- Ensure source control (public and patient masking) for patients and visitors throughout the hospital, especially when staff are in rooms or care areas AND,
- Designate adequate numbers of qualified staff to:
 - Ensure the infection control program conforms with patient care and employee safety policies and procedures;
 - Provide consultation on the infection control program, policies and procedures throughout the entire facility;
 - Ensure effective processes to inform staff and providers during rapid change of policies and procedures.

For more information, visit: DOH COVID-19 Health care Provider Resources and Recommendations: www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/HealthcareProviders

L&I Safety web page: www.Lni.wa.gov/safety-health

Other resources you can access

To find an **electronic** copy of this Hazard Alert, go to www.Lni.wa.gov/safety-health/preventing-injuries-illnesses/hazardalerts.

For other related rules, contact your local L&I office or visit the safety rules webpage: www.Lni.wa.gov/SafetyRules.

To find the nearest L&I office, visit www.Lni.wa.gov/Offices.

How can I get help from Labor & Industries?

The Department of Labor & Industries provides consultations, training, and technical assistance at no cost to employers. Call today to schedule a free confidential consultation or go to www.Lni.wa.gov/SafetyConsultants for more information.

You may also call 1-800-423-7233 or visit a local L&I office and ask for the Consultation Manager.