



# FAQs: PPE use for workers in community settings

## Should I wear full PPE during my workday just to be safe given the COVID-19 pandemic?

The use of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) – over and above business as usual requirements – is not recommended unless a worker is being asked to have close contact with:

- a person diagnosed with COVID-19
- a person directed to self-isolate by a public health professional or the police
- a person who is complaining of symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (e.g. cough, fever, shortness of breath, sore throat).

Due to Western Australia's very limited community transmission of COVID-19, it should be assumed that anyone who does not fit into the above two categories does NOT have COVID-19 – and only their organisation's standard precautions apply.

Workers in contact with the possessions or body fluids of the above people should wear disposable gloves, and follow their organisation's standard precautions.

## Is PPE the first defence against COVID-19?

The use of social distancing measures and standard precautions such as good hand hygiene are the first lines of defence against COVID-19 in all settings.

The Department of Health recommends that workplaces revise working practices where appropriate to minimise or reduce the need for close contact with a person or a person's possessions.

The use of PPE – over and above business as usual requirements – is only required when indicated.

See the [Advice for use of personal protective equipment for workers in community settings](#) for more information.

## Why does it appear that community workers in WA require less PPE than those in other places?

Western Australia is in the fortunate position of having very limited community transmission of COVID-19; far less than some jurisdictions in Australia or other countries in the world.

This means that currently the chance of COVID-19 being contracted in the community is extremely low.

The current health advice for PPE use reflects this.

## **How is the level of community transmission of COVID-19 determined?**

Community transmission is determined by the number of cases where health authorities are unable to trace the source of the COVID-19 infection.

This does not include people who have been overseas or interstate and who have been required to self-isolate for 14 days, or anyone who has been in contact with a confirmed case.

In all instances of new infection, contact tracing and quarantine measures are undertaken so that the virus is contained and not spread in the community.

The Department of Health monitors the level of community transmission of COVID-19 on a daily basis.

## **How will I know if the level of community transmission of COVID-19 increases and the advice for PPE use changes?**

The Department of Health assesses the level of COVID-19 community transmission daily, and is ready to communicate any adjustment to its health advice as required.

'Widespread community transmission' would only occur when there is an increase in new case numbers to the extent that public health mitigation strategies, such as individual case follow up and contact tracing, are unable to halt transmission. In this instance, the public health response would be more likely to rely on the use of restrictions of activity to stop transmission and the level of PPE use and protection needed for the community sector would be escalated.

## **Why are people working in retail shops wearing masks and I'm being told not to wear one?**

There is evidence that the use of a medical mask can prevent the spread of infectious droplets from an infected person. However, there is currently no evidence that the wearing of a mask (medical or other types) by healthy people in the community setting can prevent them from infection with respiratory viruses, including COVID-19.

Healthy people, with no respiratory illness symptoms, only need to wear a mask if caring for a person with or suspected to have COVID-19.

WA Health guidelines for PPE use in community settings are based on the most current infection prevention and control advice, and are proportional to the level and extent of community transmission of COVID-19 in Western Australia.

## **Are these guidelines really about trying to conserve PPE?**

No. WA Health's highest priority is to protect people and workers in the community.

All guidelines for PPE use in Western Australia are based on the most current infection prevention and control advice, and are proportional to the level and extent of community transmission of COVID-19 in Western Australia.

## Does WA have enough PPE?

Additional supplies of PPE have been obtained and stock levels are being closely monitored. Supply should be sufficient if PPE is used appropriately and in accordance with Department of Health guidelines.

More generally, PPE is in short supply across the globe. It is important that it is only used when required and that appropriate PPE is selected based on the recommended advice for the type of agency and exposure.

The correct use of PPE, along with other strategies to be implemented, will assist in ensuring Western Australia continues to have enough PPE throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The WA Health system has a dedicated health team of procurement professionals working around-the-clock to secure new supplies of PPE.

## Why are there different guidelines for PPE use community settings?

The guidelines for PPE use in community settings cover a diverse workforce including:

- [Workers in community settings](#)
- [Professional first responders](#)

Each group has unique work environments, clients and professional requirements, so a 'one-size fits all' approach was not appropriate.

## What is the best way to implement these guidelines and protect my staff?

The Department of Health encourages organisations to consider making the Advice for use of personal protective equipment for workers in community settings an internal policy.

Organisations are also asked to consider how they can change normal business practices to avoid unnecessary contact with people. This includes measures such as phone or video calls to replace in person visits. If visits are required, social distancing practices should be maintained if possible.

It is each organisation's responsibility to educate its staff, contracted service providers and other stakeholders as to appropriate PPE use for its work environments. This may include activities such as providing refresher training to remind staff about existing PPE procedures and updating staff on these guidelines.

## Where do I get PPE for my organisation?

The Department of Health has developed a document to outline where agencies should go to request PPE over and above their business as usual supply.

The document outlines five broad pathways for the request and supply of PPE in WA during the COVID-19 outbreak response.

To find out which pathway is relevant to your organisation, or to find the latest advice, please visit the [Department of Health's website](#).

## How is PPE used correctly?

If PPE is not worn or disposed of correctly, self-contamination or contamination of others can occur. It is essential that PPE hasn't previously been used, put on correctly (referred to as 'donning') and removed correctly (referred to as 'doffing'). PPE should only be worn once before being disposed of.

The Department of Health has produced a [video on appropriate donning and doffing of PPE](#), which should be viewed by all staff who may have contact with clients.

It is important to avoid touching your face when wearing PPE.

In summary, the recommended sequence for donning and doffing of PPE is as below:

Donning (putting on) PPE:

- Perform hand hygiene
- Put on coverall/ gown / apron
- Put on mask
- Put on protective eyewear
- Put on gloves.

Doffing (removing) PPE:

- Remove gloves
- Perform hand hygiene
- Remove coverall/ gown / apron
- Perform hand hygiene
- Remove protective eyewear
- Perform hand hygiene
- Remove mask
- Perform hand hygiene.

## What is the correct disposal method of used PPE?

Personal protective equipment can be disposed into general waste, with bin liners. When disposing ensure you do not touch your face. Ensure bags are strong, not prone to splitting or breaking and can be removed easily from bins. Bags should only be filled to three-quarters of maximum capacity. Do not manually 'push down' contents to make more room.

Bags should be tied and sealed from the top. Finally wash your hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub once you have completed doffing and disposing of your PPE.

### **Can I reuse PPE?**

PPE must be used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Re-used or inadequately cleaned PPE can pose significant risks to both the workers and the community.

### **Can I use my own PPE?**

All PPE must be approved prior to use by an organisation's existing product evaluation processes.

The Department of Health does not support individuals purchasing or making their own PPE (e.g. masks, gowns or aprons and gloves), as the effectiveness and suitability for use cannot be guaranteed.

### **Who can I ask if I have questions?**

Initial queries regarding the use and supply of PPE over and above business as usual should be dealt with by the management of each organisation.

If further clarification or assistance is required, management can contact [covid19.healthoperations@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:covid19.healthoperations@health.wa.gov.au)

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