



Iowa Health Care Association  
Iowa Center for Assisted Living  
Iowa Center for Home Care

## FAQ's PPE, Exposure, Screening & Testing 3/30/2020

**Please note that this guidance is current as of the date listed. Please check the IHCA COVID webpage or the IDPH website for the most current information.**

### PPE

**What are the recommendations for caregivers for wearing a mask? Should all staff be wearing a mask during their shift if there are no positive cases? If there are positive cases, should all staff wear a mask or just the staff providing care?**

Our national affiliates are urging providers to conserve as much as possible the current supplies of PPE on hand because it is apparent that there will be no supply relief for at least 4-6 weeks. We urge providers to carefully consider the current [CDC](#) and [IDPH](#) guidance for use of facemasks. Employees who have had potential or confirmed exposure to COVID-19 should wear a face mask when providing direct care to patients or if unable to maintain social distancing of 6 feet.

***If there is a patient with positive COVID status in your facility, all workers should wear face masks according to [3/26/2020 AHCA guidance](#) and IDPH [“Checklist for Long Term Care Facilities Experiencing COVID-19 Outbreaks.”](#) Workers who are providing care for isolated confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients should wear gown, mask, eye protection and gloves.***

The AHCA guidance also recommends that providers with COVID patients should “consider having health care workers wear all recommended PPE (gown, gloves, eye protection, N-95 respirator or, if not available, a facemask) for the care of all residents, regardless of presence of symptoms. Implement protocols for extended use of eye protection and facemasks”. **However, given current supplies of PPE that may be impractical or impossible.**

**What is the employee mask guidance for potential exposure?**

Potential employee exposure is described by IDPH in [“Isolation Guidance for Essential Services Personnel.”](#)

**Any directives on face masks that are not commercially manufactured? Should we use these if commercial PPE is not available?**

Please refer to these two documents available on the IDPH website:

[Use of Homemade Face Masks with Face Shields for Patient Care when Commercially Produced PPE is Unavailable](#)

[Guidance for Iowans to sew homemade masks for healthcare providers](#)

Instructions for making face shields may be found on [You Tube](#).

**Can they be worn between patients? How should the mask be laundered?**

Commercially manufactured masks may be worn between patients if not contaminated or wet, and still hold shape and fit on the face. See the above referenced documents for treatment of homemade masks.

**How can we get mask, N95 Mask, and gowns?**

If you have few or no supplies you should contact your local public health department to help you arrange for supplies if needed.

**We have a pregnant employee whose doctor is requiring she has PPE or she cannot work. What PPE would she need?**

The CDC provides some excellent [guidance for protecting pregnant workers](#). The guidance suggests that facilities may want to limit exposure of pregnant workers to COVID positive patients. Unless she is providing care to a COVID positive patient, a face mask should be sufficient PPE.

**Our county health department is asking us if we have enough PPE to last for 7 days. How do we determine what is one day PPE supply for one COVID positive patient?**

There are two calculators on the IHCA COVID-19 webpage to help with determining your day to day needs.

**We don't have any test kits for N95s and cannot get them. We don't have any initial testing ability for employees. What do we do?**

While N95 masks are ideally recommended for use with COVID-19, many providers will have few if any available. Check with local paint stores, hardware stores, home improvement stores or local contractors to see if they have any commercial N95 mask you may have. For now CDC guidance is that face masks are sufficient for use unless you are conducting a COVID positive patient procedure which creates a risk for aerosolizing secretions such as cleaning and inserting tracs or administering nebulizer treatments. Those procedures would require the use of a N95 mask when providing that care.

**Do staffing agency employees have to provide their own PPE?**

Providers should check the provisions of their contracts for this detail. If it is not addressed in your contract you should contact your staffing agency to resolve.

**What should we have on hand in order to care for patients with COVID?**

Gowns, gloves, face masks, N95 respirators, and face masks. Additionally, adequate supplies of hand sanitizer, soap, paper towels and waste receptacles. You should have isolation signs to post outside of rooms and signage that indicates the equipment needed to provide care in the patient rooms.

## **Exposure, Screening and Testing**

**I have an employee who lives with family who will be returning from Florida. What are your recommendations for her?**

Follow the guidance recommended by IDPH in ["Isolation Guidance for Essential Services Personnel."](#)

**How can we get local hospitals and doctors to test our employees that are showing symptoms? We need to know if it is Influenza A, B, or COVID-19.**

If you have questions regarding testing protocols regarding employees, please call IDPH.

During Business Hours: 800-362-2736

After Business Hours Only: 515-323-4360 *(This will take you to the State Patrol dispatch who will notify the state epidemiologist.)*

**I have staff who have tested positive and now have had no fever for 72 hours, symptoms have improved, and are at least 7 days since symptoms first appeared. Are they immune from getting COVID19 again? Are they now able to return to serving patients without restrictions if following standard infection control procedures?**

Again, follow the guidance recommended by IDPH in [“Isolation Guidance for Essential Services Personnel”](#) and the guidance found on the [CDC website](#) about PPE use after returning to work. There is no clear evidence at present that having COVID-19 once provides future immunity.

**A healthcare worker showing signs and symptoms of respiratory illness and have been prescribed an antibiotic. If the worker is running a temp do we still wait the 72 hours after they are fever free?**

Yes. Any worker running a temp should be fever free for 72 hours before returning to work as listed in previous IDPH guidance and at least 7 days out from the onset of symptoms.

**Is your interpretation that well-employees who are considered exposed must self-isolate for 14 days, OR are they able to work if asymptomatic with ongoing monitoring?**

Follow the guidance recommended by IDPH in [“Isolation Guidance for Essential Services Personnel.”](#) Essential Services Personnel may return to work after a confirmed or suspected exposure with proper screening and use of PPE when warranted.

**Is the recommendation of temperature pulse respirations and SPO2 every shift or at least twice a day... is that for residents or all residents, staff and essential personnel?**

That guidance is for screening residents not employees.

**If you have an employee or employees that report illness where can they go to get testing? Some clinics are telling individuals to stay home if not feeling well. This does not provide a firm guidance for the facility as to how to address the employee with how long to be off work?**

Not all patients with respiratory symptoms need to be tested. Health care workers exhibiting respiratory symptoms of any kind should remain at home according to the guidance found in [“Isolation Guidance for Essential Services Personnel”](#) regardless of their testing status. According to this [IDPH guidance](#) however, health care workers are a priority for testing.