

Managing COVID-19 risk: union guidelines for healthcare workers

This document contains our expectations around COVID-19 management, which may go beyond the requirements provided by DoH, and is to be used during periods of high community transmission.

What should your employer do to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19?

- Identify and manage the risk of exposure to healthcare workers (HCW), including when caring in people's homes
- Consult Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) and HCW whenever decisions are made about managing COVID-19 risks
- Implement a range of controls starting from those that are most effective (such as optimal ventilation) before reverting to and relying on lower-level controls (such as PPE)

What if an unexpected COVID case arises/in case of an outbreak (more than one case)

- Employers should have plans in place on how an outbreak will be managed
- An outbreak management plan should:
 - provide adequate detail on how an outbreak would be managed in different areas/wards of the health service from an infection control perspective, but also consider broader occupational health and safety factors
 - include a comprehensive range of controls that can be escalated and de-escalated in response to risk
 - be specific and detailed enough that anyone could pick it up and put it into action
 - be developed in conjunction with HSR/s and workers and regularly reviewed and updated, including to account for changes in the local environment and risks to the service
 - be communicated to workers
- Implementation of immediate PCR testing of all patients/residents/staff who have been exposed, with daily testing for 6 days and on day 13, or on advice of the Public Health Unit
- Immediately apply COVID-19 airborne precautions for all workers (including those not directly working in impacted areas)

We recommend that healthcare workers:

- Find out who is your Health and Safety Representative (HSR) - if there isn't one in your workplace, contact your union to find out how to elect an HSR
- Make sure you have been fit tested within the last 12 months and have access to an appropriate respirator
- Make sure that your ward/unit is consulted if changes are made to how the risk of COVID-19 is managed, including when there is an outbreak

*during periods of high levels of community transmission

Ways to manage COVID-19 risk (as per hierarchy of control)

Screening

- All workers and visitors to undertake declaration in relation to symptoms/COVID-19 status*

Environment and amenities

- Adequate and properly maintained ventilation systems, isolation and negative pressure rooms and areas, air purifiers
- Appropriate facilities for staff to change, shower, don and doff PPE and take breaks

Processes and procedures

- Isolation and zoning of COVID/SCOVID patients
- HCW cohorting/workforce bubbles minimising unnecessary contact with and between workers, limiting contact between teams caring for COVID/SCOVID patients and other workers
- Limit visitors to 2 per patient per day (where appropriate)

PPE and Respirators

- COVID-19 airborne precautions any time caring for/in the vicinity of COVID-19 or SCOVID patients/residents

PPE recommendations				
	Disposable gloves	Disposable apron/gown	P2 / N95 respirator	Eye protection
COVID-19 airborne precautions	Standard precautions	Standard precautions	✓	✓

- All HCWs have been fit tested
- All HCW provided with N95/P2 respirators if requested and should be considered standard in areas that are not specifically designated as a COVID-19 area*
- Visitors are provided with an N95/P2 respirator when coming into facility