

## Use of Personal Protective Equipment

### SYNOPSIS

Public health advice on the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) has evolved with the scientific evidence on transmission. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) develops and updates guidance on infection prevention and control for acute health care settings and long-term care facilities. PHAC has also provided advice to workplaces and businesses on how to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infections in the workplace, which may include the use of PPE.

### POTENTIAL QUESTION

Why isn't the Government recommending PPE, including N-95 masks, for all front-line workers?

### SUMMARY

The Public Health Agency of Canada continues to collaborate closely with the provinces and territories to provide advice on the prevention and control of infections in various healthcare facilities, including long-term care facilities. The Agency also advises Canadian businesses providing essential services to help them determine the necessary personal protective equipment that is the most suitable for their workplaces.

### POSSIBLE QUESTION

Why isn't the government recommending the wearing of personal protective equipment, including N-95 masks, by all front-line workers?

### KEY MESSAGES

- The appropriate use of personal protective equipment or PPE is essential to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Expert guidance is supporting the appropriate use of PPE in health care settings.
- This guidance will evolve as science provides more information on COVID-19 transmission.
- The Government of Canada emphasizes that, for all Canadians, physical distancing, hand hygiene and wearing a non-medical mask are effective ways to prevent transmission of the COVID-19 virus.
- We encourage Canadians and businesses to:
  - Follow their local public health authority's advice on the use of PPE and non-medical masks; and
  - Follow the advice of provincial and territorial environmental authorities and municipalities on their proper disposal.

### KEY MESSAGES [Revised French to follow]

- The appropriate use of personal protective equipment or PPE is part of infection prevention and control.
- In close collaboration with the provinces and territories, the Public Health Agency of Canada has developed evidence-based

guidelines on the infection prevention and control in acute care facilities and long-term care facilities and parameters regarding home care, including the appropriate use of PPE.

- The Agency also advised workplaces and businesses outside of the health sector on how to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infections in the workplace, which may include the use of personal protective equipment at some workplaces.
- The government continues to stress that adhering to physical distancing guidelines, hand washing and **mask wearing** are the most effective ways to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.
- Wearing a non-medical mask or face covering when you can't keep a distance of two metres from others is recommended as an additional measure that you can take to prevent transmitting the virus to others.
- Non-medical masks and face coverings are not personal protection equipment, but they are a way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to others.

***IF PRESSED ON USE OF NON-MEDICAL MASKS FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS:***

- Healthcare workers need medical masks, including surgical, medical procedure masks and N95 **respirators**.

***IF PRESSED ON THE WEARING OF NON-MEDICAL MASKS BY HEALTH WORKERS:***

- Health workers need medical masks, including surgical masks, medical procedure masks and respirators, such as N95 masks.

***IF PRESSED ON THE REASONS WHY THE POSITION ON MASK WEARING BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC HAS CHANGED***

- The Canadian public health directives concerning COVID-19 are gradually changing as the available evidence-based data and our understanding of COVID-19 develops. We are continually analyzing the evidence-based data and are collaborating with our partners in Canada and around the world to learn more.
- Wearing a non-medical mask is an additional measure we can take to protect others, in particular in public places where physical distancing is impossible (grocery stores, confined spaces like public transit, etc.).

**BACKGROUND**

Canadian public health guidance related to COVID-19 has been adjusted as the evidence base and our understanding of COVID-19 evolves.

Healthcare workers need medical masks, including surgical, medical procedure masks and N95 respirators. It is extremely important that we have enough supply of medical masks for healthcare workers where they are urgently needed for medical procedures and to care for individuals who have COVID-19.

### **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in healthcare settings**

The Public Health Agency of Canada's (PHAC) interim guidance on infection prevention and control in acute healthcare settings was updated to ensure we provide comprehensive recommendations based on the best available evidence. The guidance emphasizes the need for environmental and administrative controls in facilities to protect healthcare workers and patients, as well as the fundamental importance of training in the use of PPE.

In new technical guidance, PHAC recommends that all healthcare workers in acute health care settings wear medical masks and eye protection/face shields for the full duration of a shift. Wearing a medical mask throughout the duration of a shift is an important measure to help reduce the risk of transmission from a healthcare worker to a patient. This recommendation applies to healthcare workers who are in direct contact with patients, as well as environmental services staff working in patient care areas. In addition, any healthcare workers who have COVID-19-related symptoms should immediately go home and only return to work following the advice of their local public health units.

Healthcare workers should refer to their province or territory's guidance, as well as facility policies on the use of masks, eye protection, and other PPE, including any PPE conservation strategies that are in place.

PPE may be a component of infection prevention efforts in non-healthcare workplaces. However, the choice and use of PPE is based on occupational health and safety advice specific to the job and workplace. PHAC provides information to help employers and employees determine what infection prevention and control measures, which might include PPE, are necessary in their workplaces.

### Environmental impacts from increased PPE usage

Increased PPE use is creating more PPE waste, which is not currently recyclable or biodegradable. While single-use PPE is the current standard for medical settings, options are becoming increasingly available for reusable masks for non-medical purposes and the public. These options are more cost-effective and environmentally friendly than single-use, disposable masks, particularly as more jurisdictions make mask-wearing mandatory in certain contexts.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, a number of federal initiatives are investing in PPE technology advancements. These advancements, such as innovative solutions to disposable masks and gowns, will help reduce the amount of PPE waste from both medical and non-medical settings. The government also continues to work with provinces and territories through the Canadian Council of the Ministers of the Environment (CCME) to explore how PPE waste can be diverted away from landfills.

Provinces, territories and local governments are also providing vital leadership in developing programs to reduce litter, prevent plastic pollution and recover materials through recycling services and material depots.

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