
Date:	December 17, 2021
To:	All GRH staff, physicians and volunteers
From:	Marc Simard, Director, Occupational Health and Safety, Shelley Schmidt, Director, IPAC
Regarding:	Interim PPE recommendations based on increasing prevalence of Omicron variant.

Quick details

- Public Health Ontario has released interim PPE recommendations as a result of the increased prevalence of Omicron.
- N95 respirators (fit tested, seal checked) are now recommended interim PPE (pending further data on omicron) for all extended patient interactions (known or suspect COVID cases) occurring within the patient room.
- A medical mask may be considered appropriate PPE as an alternate to the recommended N95 in addition to gown, gloves, and eye protection as part of your [point of care risk assessment](#) (PRCA)
- Staff, volunteers, care partners continue to require a medical mask

Given the ongoing Omicron COVID-19 variant emergence into Canada, and as an abundance of caution, Public Health Ontario has issued an interim recommendation for PPE use during Omicron. At this point in time, there is limited data related Omicron and its impact, as it is very new. There are early estimates that show this variant has increased transmissibility and decreased vaccine effectiveness.

The interim changes to our PPE practices when caring for suspect or positive COVID-19 patients during this Omicron wave include recommendations for the use of N95 respirators (or equivalent) as well as an isolation gown, gloves, and eye protection that include in the following situations:

- In a patient room, when providing direct care to patients in Droplet/Contact Precautions with suspect or confirmed COVID-19 (Note: direct care is defined as 15 minutes or greater within 1 meter of the patient) AND
- For environmental service workers when they are entering and cleaning an inpatient room in which the patient is in Droplet/Contact Precautions AND
- For patients in Droplet/Contact precautions and the staff is unclear if they are suspect or confirmed COVID-19
- In outpatient and ambulatory settings (including ED) when providing care to patients with suspect or confirmed COVID-19 or is in Droplet/Contact precautions
- As per current practice, when performing aerosol generating medical procedures on patients

Please see the included table from the [PHO brief](#) for further clarification on PPE selection.

A medical mask, in addition to gown, gloves, and eye protection, is also considered acceptable PPE, and may be considered as part of your [point of care risk assessment](#) (PRCA) for very short duration work (such as dropping off a food tray), or where you will not be in close contact with the patient.

Staff members involved with COVID-19 suspect/confirmed cases who are undertaking aerosol generating medical procedures MUST wear an N95 mask (fit tested, seal checked) along with gloves, gown, and eye protection.

Directive #5 is still in effect. We would like to remind staff that a [PCRA](#) continues to be required for all patient interactions, and should take into consideration the patient and their ability to wear their mask, the length of time that the worker is in close contact (less than 1 m for 15 minutes, the environment, and tasks involved).

At this time, there is no change to patient placement:

- COVID-19 positive patients are required to be in a private room, or cohorted with another positive patient in consultation with IPAC
- A COVID-19 patient undergoing an AGMP should be placed in a negative pressure room if available, or in a private room with the door closed (including a portable HEPA unit, if available).

Low risk COVID-19 patients, such as those who are undergoing asymptomatic surveillance or those with atypical symptoms and an alternative diagnosis may continue to be placed in droplet contact isolation within the bed space, in consultation with IPAC.

The situation with Omicron in Ontario is rapidly evolving, and we will continue to review Provincial guidance and policies as they become available to us.

Thank you for continuing to be vigilant in following local public health guidelines including exercising caution around gathering, masking, self-monitoring for symptoms and prompt testing if new symptoms of COVID-19 develop. Please get your third dose of the vaccine as soon as you are eligible. We are so grateful for your commitment to keeping your colleagues, patients and our community safe and well cared for.

Please post for the benefit of those who don't have e-mail