



State of California—Health and Human
Services Agency
**California Department of
Public Health**



March 19, 2020

TO: General Public

SUBJECT: Use of Personal Protective Equipment during COVID-19 Outbreak

This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

This document is intended to provide guidance to the public on the appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE). California is currently experiencing severe shortages of PPE. We all need to do our part to conserve and use PPE appropriately so that it is available for healthcare workers who are performing direct patient care.

Background

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel virus that has been spreading worldwide. Community-acquired cases have now been confirmed in California, and the situation is changing daily. CDPH is monitoring COVID-19 with local and federal partners, and providing guidance and resources to prevent, detect and respond to the occurrence of COVID-19 cases in California.

What is Personal Protective Equipment

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is specialized clothing or equipment worn by health care workers for their protection and to help prevent the spread of germs between patients. PPE includes but is not limited to gloves, gowns/aprons, goggles or face shields, facemasks and respirators. PPE does not guarantee total protection and must be used in combination with precautionary measures such as hand hygiene to be most effective. PPE used improperly (such as when taking off PPE) can provide a false sense of protection and potentially lead to self-contamination, particularly when not combined with other hygiene measures.

Who Needs Personal Protective Equipment

Health Care Workers

The use of PPE is crucial for healthcare workers and other first responders (for example, emergency medical technicians) that perform direct patient care in healthcare settings and routinely have prolonged, close direct contact with patients with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection or their bodily fluids.

PPE is not required, however, for employees or visitors of healthcare facilities that do not perform direct patient care or enter the room(s) of patients.

Healthcare facilities should review [CDC's PPE optimization strategies](#), including options for extended use, reprocessing, and reuse of the various PPE components given current shortages of PPE.

Individuals with Confirmed or Suspect COVID-19

CDC recommends that a facemask should be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms such as cough. This is to protect others from the risk of getting infected.

Persons Taking Care of Individuals with Suspect or Confirmed COVID-19 in Non-Healthcare Setting

If you are healthy, you only need personal protective equipment, if social distancing cannot be accomplished, and you have prolonged contact while **taking care of a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection at home, in residential communities or other non-healthcare settings**. If the patient is not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), the caregiver should wear a mask when in the same room as the patient. In addition, caregivers need to wear a disposable facemask and gloves when touching or having contact with the patient's blood, stool, or body fluids, such as saliva, sputum, nasal mucus, vomit, or urine.

Healthy Individuals

CDPH does not recommend that the general public routinely use PPE to prevent respiratory illness, including COVID-19. Instead, CDPH recommends that we take precautionary measures such as:

- Washing hands with soap and water.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. If surfaces are dirty, clean them using detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- Avoiding touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or your elbow.
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
- Staying away from work, school or other people if you become sick with respiratory symptoms like fever and cough.
- Following guidance from public health officials such as staying home if you are over the age of 65 or have underlying health conditions.

During this time of PPE shortages, we all need to do our part to conserve and use PPE appropriately so that it is available where it is most needed - for healthcare workers and other caregivers so that they can safely take care of you and your loved ones.

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