

When to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) during the COVID-19 pandemic

We have been listening to feedback from GPs and what we are hearing is there is continuing confusion around what PPE to wear when treating patients in the COVID-19 environment.

Adding to the confusion, there are multiple PPE fact sheets available which are written in slightly different ways to cover the different scenarios.

To help clarify the requirements, below is a summary of the guidelines from the [Australian Government Department of Health](#) and the [Western Australian Department of Health](#).

If you do NOT suspect COVID-19

- Follow your usual practice guidelines including physical distancing, cough/respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene.
- Observe physical distancing of at least 1.5 metres, except when providing a physical examination or clinical care.
- Perform a risk assessment based on the patient's presenting complaint or condition to determine whether PPE is required. This is based on the principles of Standard and Transmission Based precautions as outlined in the [Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare \(2019\)](#).
- Perform hand hygiene before and after patient contact as per the [5 Moments of Hand Hygiene](#)
- The routine use of masks is not currently recommended due to the low rate of community transmission of COVID-19 in Western Australia.

If you DO suspect COVID-19

- Follow your usual practice guidelines including hand hygiene, physical distancing and cough/respiratory hygiene.
- Don the appropriate PPE as required according to the [Identification and Use of Personal Protective Equipment in the Clinical Setting During the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).
- Ask the patient to perform hand hygiene and put on a surgical mask. Ensure it is being worn correctly.
- Direct the patient to a single room, whether or not respiratory symptoms are present.
- If a single room is unavailable, direct the patient to a separate area away from other patients.
- Perform hand hygiene before as per the [5 Moments of Hand Hygiene](#)
- The patient should be referred for testing for COVID-19 if this has not been conducted already. (For up to date information on testing locations, visit the [HealthPathways WA COVID-19 Requests page](#). If required, email healthpathways@wapha.org.au for log on details.)

For further information about the correct way to don and doff PPE, refer to the Western Australian Department of Health [Donning and Doffing Poster](#), and [video](#).

If you would like to display posters in your clinic about infection prevention and control in the COVID-19 environment, the [Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Healthcare](#) has produced the following resource:

- [Break the chain poster for use in clinical areas and waiting rooms](#)

You can also find more information on the RACGP website, in the RACGP [Infection Prevention and Control Standards](#), or on HealthPathways via the [Practice Management pathway](#). If required, email healthpathways@wapha.org.au for log on details.

For further information please contact the Practice Assist team via email practiceassist@wapha.org.au or 1800 227 747.