



Distribution of PPE through PHNs: Tranche 1, Surgical masks and P2/N95 respirators for general practice and community pharmacy

Guidance on the supply of masks from the National Medical Stockpile (NMS) for General Practice (including Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services) and community pharmacy through Primary Health Networks (PHNs)

8 March 2020

With the emergence of COVID-19 across many countries, there is a global shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), including surgical masks and P2/N95 respirators. As a first step in releasing PPE from the National Medical Stockpile, the Australian Government has provided a limited supply of surgical masks (1,125,000) and P2/N95 respirators (27,200) for general practices (including Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services) and community pharmacies with a demonstrated need.

This guidance document is provided to ensure consistent and transparent management of the limited supply in the first tranche.

Surgical masks

Intended use of surgical masks

Surgical masks supplied in this tranche are intended to be provided to general practices and, when no local commercial supply is available, community pharmacies:

- For the protection of health professionals and practice/pharmacy staff in direct contact with people presenting with fever and/or respiratory symptoms including cough, sore throat and/or shortness of breath
- For provision to people who are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, for the protection of other patients and staff, and of the public while the patient returns home.

There is no need for the general public or health workers to wear masks unless they are dealing with symptomatic patients. Further guidance on the use of surgical masks can be found at <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-information-on-the-use-of-surgical-masks>.

Eligibility to access the supply surgical masks

General Practices, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS)

As supplies are limited, PHNs have been given the role of distributing surgical masks to practices with demonstrated need, including:

- where there is no local supply available commercially
- where practices have a population which may be more likely to have been exposed to the novel coronavirus
- where practices have an unusual number of patients presenting with respiratory symptoms

Community pharmacies

Community pharmacies are eligible to access the supply for the use of their staff when there is no available commercial supply and they have significant contact with people presenting with fever or respiratory symptoms. Masks distributed through PHNs cannot be sold as commercial stock.

Quantities

Generally, requesting providers will be allocated **one box (50 masks) per practice or community pharmacy**. However, depending on remaining stocks, PHNs have flexibility to increase the allocation based on practice size or other demonstrated need.

Process for accessing the supply of surgical masks

General practices and community pharmacies with demonstrated need should contact the relevant PHN in their region to request access to the supply. A list and contacts of PHNs can be found at <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/PHN-Locator>.

P2/N95 respirators

As part of the continued response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Department of Health has now supplied PHNs with a very small allocation of P2/N95 respirators.

Intended use of P2/N95 respirators

For routine primary care procedures, including specimen collection, surgical masks are considered to be effective. When specimen collection is undertaken they should be worn with other PPE as appropriate (gown, gloves and eye protection). P2/N95 respirators are only required for aerosol generating procedures or where there is uncontrolled coughing. See the relevant factsheet at <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/interim-advice-on-non-inpatient-care-of-persons-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-including-use-of-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>.

If GPs are unable to undertake appropriate contact and droplet precautions for clinical assessment and specimen collection from patients with suspected COVID-19 through lack of appropriate PPE, they should refer cases to appropriate collection centres or Emergency Departments.

Eligibility to access the supply of P2/N95 respirators

PHNs are asked to conserve stocks of P2/N95 respirators as far as possible.

Distribution of P2/N95 respirators should be limited to general practices, including ACCHS, who need to assess suspected COVID-19 cases because of the unavailability of nearby dedicated respiratory clinics or Emergency Departments (e.g. in some rural and remote communities). Such practices need to have isolation facilities and other appropriate infrastructure, staff competent in use of PPE, and a pandemic plan. P2/N95 respirators should only be used with other PPE (gowns, gloves and eye protection).

More information

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au

Call the **National Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080**. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

The phone number of each state or territory public health agency is available at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts