**COVID-19 – Personal protective equipment (PPE) for Allied Health in Private Practice settings**



Updated – 13 September 2021

**OFFICIAL**

**In the changing COVID-19 environment, content is often being updated. To ensure you are aware of the most recent changes, all content updates and the date the document was last updated will be highlighted in yellow.**

**It is strongly recommended that all allied health professionals providing face to face patient treatment are fully vaccinated**

PPE for Allied Health in Private Practice Settings

This document aligns with the Victorian Department of Health’s (the department) guide to the ‘conventional personal protective equipment (PPE) guide for use during the COVID-19 pandemic (29 July 2021)’ and ‘Personal protective equipment (PPE) and its levels of protection’: [https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/personal-protective-equipment-ppe-covid-19](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com_-3Furl-3Dhttps-253A-252F-252Fwww.dhhs.vic.gov.au-252Fpersonal-2Dprotective-2Dequipment-2Dppe-2Dcovid-2D19-26data-3D02-257C01-257Cjenny.mikakos-2540parliament.vic.gov.au-257Cada9670e7c6a484da18508d8306c9e9e-257C821af0ec31404137af0e6690286fb673-257C0-257C0-257C637312590368615742-26sdata-3DBNESVhedArNROhHOtdM4aXwD5Je28nVUrfKM9LtH9t0-253D-26reserved-3D0&d=DwMGaQ&c=JnBkUqWXzx2bz-3a05d47Q&r=qjy60njmK5fSKb-UCCXoq9DGX5XvTBI-3Abrgtd3NdmHn1DziGJSpN1HZsXtx7Wj&m=7gcNGDGpjXiuV9cU40H_2uvGK1zDZb2hEX5l_3aXwMo&s=ApfyfsLWu3scFZNNjJsEwoh5drTvlM0qEWocRRHg6C8&e=)

This document should be read in conjunction with the Victorian health service guidance and response to COVID-19 risks (VSHGR) <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-health-service-guidance-and-response-covid-19-risks>

Please note that this guide does not apply to PPE use in residential aged care facilities.

It should be noted that PPE is only one element of health care worker protection and it is essential that the hierarchy of controls is implemented in its entirety to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Other infectious diseases requiring PPE as part of transmission-based precautions are not addressed in this document. This document relates specifically to COVID-19, and services will still need to apply the standard precautions for other patient conditions as they did pre-COVID-19. This document does not replace those existing guidelines.

**Allied Health Professionals**

**Table 1** outlines the recommended PPE for allied health professionals in private practice settings based on the current public health advice and as per the updated ‘*Coronavirus (COVID-19) – A Guide to the conventional use of personal protective equipment (PPE) (29 July 2021)’*.

This includes, but is not limited to; private practice physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, optometrists, psychologists, podiatrists and community pharmacists.

* The department recommends that all healthcare workers should utilise a disposable, Tier / Level 1 surgical mask when directly treating patients. For allied health professionals, the only recommended exception for not wearing a mask is for those professions where clear enunciation or visibility of their mouth is required, such as speech pathology and audiology.
* Clinicians should not use face shields as a substitute to mask wearing. If a face shield is to be worn, this should be in combination with a mask.
* Unless indicated by a higher risk of potential exposure, P2/N95 masks should not be worn for ‘Tier 1 level’ patient consultations/ interactions.
* Unless soiled or damp, clinicians may wear a mask or surgical gown up to a maximum of 4 hours. Gloves must be changed and hand hygiene performed between every patient interaction.
* A surgical mask should be worn in all patient-facing areas, private offices and non-patient facing areas.

In the context of allied health private practice, non-clinical staff includes, but is not limited to, reception staff and practice managers.

* Non-clinical staff who have public-facing roles (i.e. have direct contact and interactions with patients) should wear a Tier/Level 1 surgical mask. This is irrespective of the use of a face shield or glass partitions in public facing areas. Cloth masks are not to be used.
* Non-clinical staff must maintain appropriate physical distancing from patients and members of the public.

Patients/Clients

* Patients/Clients, as with all Victorians, are required to wear a face mask in accordance with the Chief Health Officer Directions, unless a lawful exception applies. For more information on face mask requirements for Victorians please refer to the department’s website <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/face-masks>

**General Guidance**

* General information on environmental cleaning requirements is outlined within the department’s ‘*Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) - Infection Prevention and Control guideline*’: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/covid19-infection-control-guidelines>
* Allied health private practices should develop operational policies to minimise the risk of transmission. For example, policies and processes to ensure physical distancing and density quotients are maintained in treatment and office areas, and during coffee and lunch breaks.
* Allied health appointments should be deferred/delayed for individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19, OR are awaiting the results of a SARS-CoV-2 test, OR have tested positive and have not yet been cleared AND where a risk assessment indicates an increased risk of COVID-19 infection, individuals should not access face to face allied health services without a negative test result for COVID-19. They can however access allied health services via Telehealth options.
* A detailed screen and risk assessment of patients should be undertaken before face to face interactions and consider the following; LGA of residence or work, presence of symptoms consistent with COVID-19, and contact with a confirmed case or exposure site.
* Information on Victoria’s return to COVIDSafe settings for Allied Health are available via the Business

Victoria website: [https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-sector-guidance-health-care-and-](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-sector-guidance-health-care-and-social-assistance)

[social-assistance](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-sector-guidance-health-care-and-social-assistance)

* Allied health professionals in private practice should limit home visiting services wherever possible, and instead utilise Telehealth options. Where home visiting services are provided, the allied health professional should complete a risk assessment of the patient and the environment which they will be entering (i.e. the health status of other people who reside with the patient or who may be present during the visit). Based on this assessment, the allied health professional may elect to use a higher level of PPE than specified for the clinical indication of their visit.
* If providing services to third party providers (such as, residential aged care facilities or disability group accommodation), allied health professionals should contact the service provider directly to determine if face to face service delivery is required. Access to PPE guidance specific to these facilities is available via the department’s website:

[https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/aged-care-sector-coronavirus-disease-covid-19 - personal-protective-equipment-ppe](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/aged-care-sector-coronavirus-disease-covid-19%20-%20personal-protective-equipment-ppe)

[https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/community-services-all-sector-coronavirus-covid-19 - personal-protective-equipment-ppe-for-community-service-providers](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/community-services-all-sector-coronavirus-covid-19#personal-protective-equipment-ppe-for-community-service-providers)

This guidance will be reviewed on a regular basis. Please check the Victorian Department of Health website for updates at the webpages listed above.

Table 1: Allied health professional in private practice settings – conventional use

The PPE guidance has been updated to reflect patient status and reflect minimum requirements.

| TIER | For use in private practice and community pharmacy settings | Graphic of hands being washed | Graphic of a pair of gloves | Graphic of apronGraphic of a long-sleeved gown | Graphic of a long-sleeved gown | Graphic of a surgical mask | Graphic of a P2/N95 respirator | Graphic of a pair of goggles Graphic of face shield |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Hand hygiene | Disposable gloves | Level 1 gown and plastic apron | Disposable gown  | Surgical mask | P2 / N95 respirator  | Eye protection(Goggles or face shield) |
| **Tier 0 –Standard precautions** | Currently not applicable based on public health advice. | Tick - yes | As per standard precautions | As per standard precautions | As per standard precautions | As per standard precautions | Cross - no | As per standard precautions |
| **Tier 1 –****COVID-19 standard precautions** | Care of and exposure to all COVID-19 negative1 patients/residents | Tick - yes | As per standard precautions | As per standard precautions | As per standard precautions | Tick - yesMinimum Level 1 | Cross - no | As per standard precautions\*\* |
| **Tier 2 –Droplet and contact precautions** | Care of and exposure to low-risk suspected2COVID-19 patients/residentsexcluding where there is a risk of aerosol generating behaviours5 or an aerosol generating procedure needs to be performed*e.g. voice interventions,**swallowing assessments**paediatric consultations, etc.* | Tick - yes | Tick - yes | Tick - yes | Tick - yesorLevel 2, 3 or 4 | Tick - yesLevel 2 or 3\* | Cross - no\* | Tick - yesFace shield where practical |
| **Tier 3 –Airborne and contact precautions and aerosol generating procedures** | All care/exposure/contact with:* High-risk suspected COVD-19 patients/residents
* Confirmed COVID-19 patients/residents4
* Low-risk suspected COVID-19 patients2 where there is a risk of aerosol generating behaviours or an aerosol generating procedure needs to be performed

*Wherever possible, AGPs6 should not be undertaken within private practice settings and other treatment alternatives should be considered.**e.g. nebulisation where use of alternate administration devices is not possible, tracheostomy cannula inspection or change.* | Tick - yes | Tick - yes | Cross - no | Tick - yesLevel 2, 3 or 4 | Cross - no | Tick - yes | Tick - yesFace shield where practical |

1 COVID negative = A person who tests negative to a validated SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test, OR a person who is a cleared case, OR a person who screens negative and/or has no clinical or epidemiological risk factors for coronavirus.

2 Low-risk suspected COVID-19 = Persons with symptoms that could be consistent with coronavirus (COVID-19) (for example, cough, sore throat, fever, shortness of breath or runny nose) but no epidemiological risk factors as listed in the high-risk definition.

3 High-risk suspected COVID-19 = A person in **quarantine** for any reason (including: being a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19 or a returned traveller from overseas or a relevant interstate area with outbreaks (as defined by public health in the last 14 days) with or without a compatible clinical illness. This group is also referred to as “at-risk”. People who have been released from a quarantine facility (in the last 14 days) but have not undertaken any post-quarantine testing (Days 17 and 21) should be tested and Tier 3 PPE should be utilised until their negative status is confirmed. **OR** A person with a **compatible clinical illness** who meets **one or more of the following epidemiological risk factors** in the 14 days prior to illness onset:

* Contact with a confirmed case or an exposure site as defined by public health
* Was employed in an area where there is an increased risk of COVID-19 transmission, for example:
* hotel quarantine workers or any workers at ports of entry
* aged care workers/ healthcare workers working in a location where there are active outbreaks
* other high-risk industries (such as abattoirs) where there are known cases or high levels of community transmission
* Lived in or visited a geographically localised area at higher risk as determined by public health.
* Has been released from a quarantine facility in the seven days prior.

4Confirmed COVID-19 = A person who tests positive to a validated SARS-CoV-2 test.

5 AGBs = Behaviours that are more likely to generate higher concentrations of infectious respiratory aerosols. Examples include; persistent and severe coughing, screaming, shouting and women in active labour who exhibit heavy breathing and panting.

6 AGPs = Procedures performed on patients are more likely to generate higher concentrations of infectious respiratory aerosols. Examples include: bronchoscopy, tracheal intubation, non-invasive ventilation (e.g. BiPAP, CPAP), high flow nasal oxygen therapy, manual ventilation before intubation, intubation, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, suctioning, sputum induction, nebuliser use.

\* If the risk of community transmission increases, in line with the Victorian Health Service Guidance and Response to COVID-19 Risks (VSHGR) COVID Active and COVID Peak stages, Tier 3 PPE is recommended for all exposure, care and contact with low-risk suspected COVID as well as high-risk suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19.

\*\* Eye protection is added to Tier 1 PPE for exposure to all COVID-19 negative patients or clients during COVID Active and COVID Peak stages. For more specific guidance on eye protection see use of eye protection for healthcare workers <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/use-of-eye-protection-healthcare-workers-covid-19-doc>

**References**

Conventional use of PPE guidance: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/personal-protective-equipment-ppe-covid-19>

Face coverings: When to wear a face mask in Victoria: <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/face-masks-when-wear-face-mask>

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) - Infection Prevention and Control guideline. 3 June 2021 (Version 6): <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/covid19-infection-control-guidelines>

Personal protective equipment (PPE) for residential aged care: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-factsheet-ppe-guidance-racf>



Personal protective equipment (PPE) for community service providers
<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/ppe-community-service-providers-prevention-covid-19>

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Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

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