

Personal Protective Equipment



Personal protective equipment are items worn to provide a barrier to help prevent potential exposure to infectious disease. These items include eye protection, face shields, gloves, gowns, medical masks, and N95 respirators. When appropriately selected, based on individual IPC Risk Assessment, and donned and doffed correctly, personal protective equipment is an effective measure to reduce microorganism transmission in healthcare. Ongoing work continues within AHS and Covenant Health to strengthen personal protective equipment practices.

AHS Provincial Personal Protective Equipment Safety Coach Program

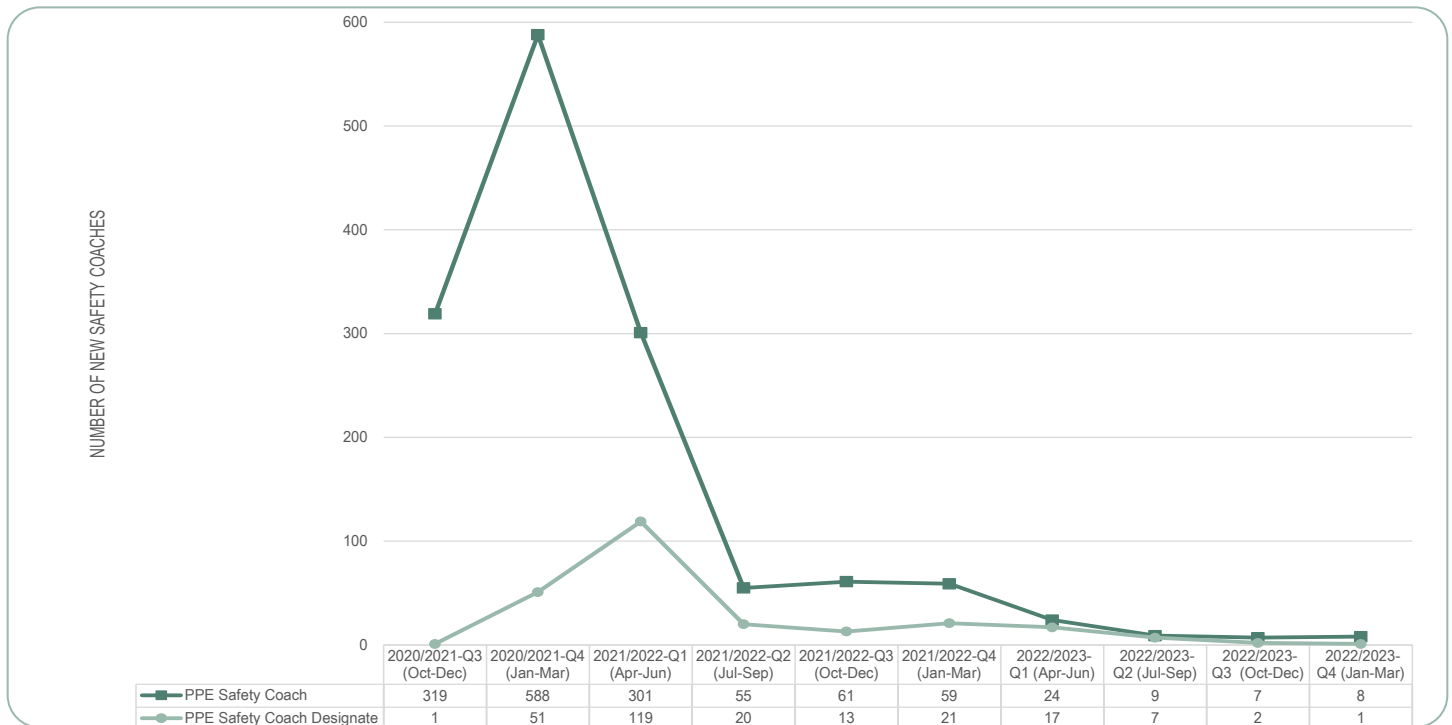
Issues related to the use of personal protective equipment were identified as significant factors in COVID-19 transmission and were common themes of outbreaks in acute care and continuing care. There is a clear need to support staff in the appropriate selection and use of this equipment and to address fatigue associated with its use. There were zone and site-specific initiatives throughout AHS and Covenant Health to address this.

In late 2020/21, AHS launched a Provincial Personal Protective Equipment Safety Coach Program for all zones and sites. This provincial program builds off of and complements existing initiatives. The program was developed by AHS IPC and endorsed by AHS Workplace Health and Safety. The goal of the program was to create a system of peer safety coaching to provide just-in-time support and mentorship to frontline employees to become comfortable selecting and using personal protective equipment to prevent transmission of infectious diseases within healthcare.

In late 2020/21, after completing a series of pilots, the provincial program was offered to AHS subsidiaries and contracted partners in continuing care. The steps that potential coaches go through are the same, but a modified designate or train-the-trainer process is used. When AHS subsidiaries and contracted providers in continuing care identify designates for their sites, they are trained by the provincial program to become a Personal Protective Equipment Safety Coach Designate and to become a trainer for additional safety coaches at their site. Additional safety coaches are linked to the provincial program through their designate.

In 2022/2023, the Provincial Personal Protective Equipment Safety Coach Program celebrated its two-year anniversary. As of March 31, 2023, 1,429 AHS staff at 132 locations were trained as coaches and 252 contracted service provider staff at 129 continuing care sites were trained as designates who can then train coaches within their organization or site. The number of staff being trained as coaches and designates decreased last fiscal year and continued to decrease this fiscal year (Figure 15). During this time of decreased uptake, the provincial program used the opportunity to update its resources to reflect changes in recommendations and to support safety coaches and designates through the community of practice. In 2023/2024, strategic planning discussions will occur internally to determine the next steps for this provincial program given the challenge of decreased uptake.

Figure 15: Personal protective equipment safety coaches and designates trained



Despite these challenges, to celebrate, Dr. Mark Joffe sent the following message to all safety coaches.

As healthcare workers we know how critical the appropriate use of personal protective equipment is in our daily work... A recent evaluation has shown just how effective this program has been... Congratulations to all of you. Every one of you has played a key role in that success and in reaching this milestone. On behalf of the executive leadership, I want to thank you for your efforts in protecting our staff, our patients, and our visitors ... I also want to thank our leadership teams for embracing this program's importance. This program could not be the success it is without you, and I encourage you all to continue to work to ensure our safety coaches are always there when needed... – Dr. Mark Joffe, Former Vice President and Medical Director, Cancer Care Alberta, Clinical Support Services and Provincial Clinical Excellence

As part of the celebration, three safety coaches shared testimonials including “Being a Personal Protective Equipment safety coach - What’s in it for me”, “Personal Protective Equipment pauses!”, and “Receiving Feedback & support from a Personal Protective Equipment Safety Coach”.

The Provincial Personal Protective Equipment Safety Coach Program Safety support coaches through a community of practice. The purpose of the community of practice is to create a virtual place for those trained as safety coaches to come together and share experiences and knowledge so they are better able to support one another and their colleagues. In 2021/2022, there were five community of practice sessions hosted on different dates and times. On average, 73 coaches from AHS and contracted partners attended these sessions.

AHS Provincial Personal Protective Equipment Safety Coach Program Evaluation

In 2021/2022, a formative evaluation of the Provincial Personal Protective Equipment Safety Coach Program was conducted in non-continuing care settings to assess the program in its early stages of implementation, with the intention to learn about the program and improve it moving forward. In 2022/2023, a formative evaluation of the program in continuing care settings was conducted with grant funding from Healthcare Excellence Canada. AHS Health Systems Knowledge and Evaluation completed the evaluation.

Overall, the formative evaluations in both 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 found value in the program. The program in continuing care settings was well received by designates, safety coaches, and staff at adopting sites. As part of the implementation in continuing care settings, funding was available to sites to pay for staff time to attend training. However, funding for staff training and time was not noted by adopting sites as a reason for adoption. Based on information collected by the AHS Provincial Continuing Care Internal Audit Team, on average, sites that participated in the program saw improvements in staff using personal protective equipment appropriately. Recommendations for improvement include improving the program's communication strategy, tailoring module scenarios for continuing care settings, enhancing access to the highly valued community of practice, and having the training accessible to staff whose first language is not English.

