

AHS Position Statement

Pregnant Healthcare Workers and COVID-19

This position statement is intended to provide general guidance only. Any AHS healthcare worker, whether pregnant or not, who requires a workplace accommodation due to a medical condition should speak with their supervisor or appropriate Medical Staff leader regarding the [workplace accommodation process](#).

1. Protecting the health and safety of healthcare workers is an imperative for employers and unions. During the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that the appropriate steps are taken to protect the health and safety of all healthcare workers in Alberta and prevent exposure to and transmission of COVID-19.¹
2. In order to protect the health & safety of **all** healthcare workers with respect to COVID-19, appropriate steps include:
 - Using [Routine Practices](#) for all patients at all times, which includes a [point of care risk assessment](#);
 - Following the [respiratory illness algorithm](#) when assessing patients who present with influenza-like illness or COVID-19 symptoms;
 - Adhering to [IPC recommendations for COVID-19](#) when caring for a patient with suspected or confirmed COVID-19;
 - Ensuring that proper [donning](#) and [doffing](#) procedures are followed whenever personal protective equipment is worn;
 - Being diligent with [hand hygiene](#), and practicing physical distancing [at work](#) and in [community settings](#);
 - Staying home from work when ill, or when directed to do so because of travel history or unprotected* exposure to a COVID-19 case, in order to prevent potential transmission of infection to others.

* unprotected exposure is defined as providing care to a COVID-19 patient, or having direct contact with infectious bodily fluids of a COVID-19 patient, while not wearing the [recommended personal protective equipment](#)

3. The measures listed above are intended to be protective of **all** healthcare workers, whether pregnant or not. If those measures are followed, then a pregnant healthcare worker is not at greater risk of being exposed to the COVID-19 virus than a non-pregnant healthcare worker. No additional personal protective equipment measures are required for pregnant healthcare workers beyond those that are advised for non-pregnant healthcare workers.

4. Note that all AHS healthcare workers, whether pregnant or not, who are unable to fully adhere to the [IPC recommendations for COVID-19](#) (e.g. due to insufficient training, physical limitations, etc) should **not** provide care to patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.
5. Thus far, data from existing case series has consistently demonstrated that pregnant women are at neither a greater risk of acquiring COVID-19 infection nor a greater risk of developing severe COVID-19 disease if infected, as compared to non-pregnant women of the same age^{2,3,4}. Data continues to accumulate as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds, and this position statement will be updated as necessary to reflect any relevant changes in this data.
6. To date, there has also been no definitive evidence of vertical transmission of COVID-19 (in utero transmission of the virus from mother to child).^{2,3,4}
7. The physical changes that can occur in pregnancy (particularly those in the third trimester after 28 weeks gestational age) may make it more difficult for pregnant healthcare workers to adhere to the personal protective equipment precautions noted in the [IPC recommendations for COVID-19](#). In such circumstances, the pregnant healthcare worker should **not** provide care to patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 or any other patients where the wearing of personal protective equipment is required. The pregnant healthcare worker should speak with their supervisor or appropriate Medical Staff leader regarding the [workplace accommodation process](#).
8. The [IPC recommendations for COVID-19](#) include the use of an N95 respirator when an [aerosol-generating medical procedure](#) is performed. All healthcare workers who are required to wear an N95 respirator must ensure that their N95 respirator fit test is up to date. In accordance with the AHS [Respiratory Protection Code of Practice](#), respirator fit testing must be conducted every two years. Additionally, a fit test is indicated in situations where there has been significant weight gain or weight loss. Therefore, a pregnant healthcare worker who is required to wear an N95 respirator, and who has experienced significant weight changes during pregnancy, must ensure that their N95 respirator fit-test is up to date.
9. This position statement and guidance applies to all care areas including dedicated COVID-19 wards or surgical suites. Clinical leaders and managers should seek support from their Human Resources advisor and Abilities Management, when reviewing staffing needs that may be impacted by staff with underlying medical conditions or advanced age.
10. The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented situation, which may cause additional anxiety and stress for staff. AHS employees can find support through the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) (EFAP). EFAP is a free and confidential service available 24/7 at 1-877-273-3134, and offers a range of services to help AHS employees and their families navigate through work, health and life challenges. For physicians who are not AHS employees, the [Physician and Family Support Program](#) is available 24/7 at 1-877-767-4637. In addition, the [Psychologists' Association of Alberta](#) and [Canadian Psychological Association](#) are now connecting frontline healthcare providers who may be feeling stressed, overwhelmed or distressed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with members who are providing pro bono psychological services.

References

- ¹ Joint Statement: COVID-19 and Personal Protective Equipment. March 26, 2020. <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/news/nr/ne-nr-2020-03-27-joint-statement-covid-ppe.pdf>
- ² The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada Infectious Diseases Committee Statement on Health Care Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic. March 27, 2020. <https://sogc.org/en/content/featured-news/SOGC-Infectious-Disease-Committee-Statement-on-Health-Care-Workers-during-COVID19Pandemic.aspx>
- ³ Government of Canada. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Prevention and risks. Accessed March 28, 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks.html>
- ⁴ World Health Organization. Clinical management of severe acute respiratory infection when novel coronavirus (nCoV) infection is suspected - Interim guidance. March 13, 2020. [https://www.who.int/publications-detail/clinical-management-of-severe-acute-respiratory-infection-when-novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)-infection-is-suspected](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/clinical-management-of-severe-acute-respiratory-infection-when-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-is-suspected)