

January 14, 2022

## **Joint statement with unions on COVID-19 PPE**

Due to the changing environment related to COVID-19, Alberta Health Services (AHS), Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE), Covenant Health, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA), and United Nurses of Alberta (UNA), have updated the [joint statement](#) on the safe and effective use of personal protection equipment (PPE) in our collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This replaces the previous joint statement from February 25, 2021.

The updated joint statement reflects the evolving evidence on COVID-19 transmission and simplifies PPE guidance for leaders and health care workers in Alberta. The updated statement also confirms a shared commitment to encouraging all health care workers to pay meticulous attention to fit for work protocols, appropriate utilization of PPE, hand hygiene practices, and required physical distancing whenever possible, including when not providing direct patient care.

The changes in the updated joint statement are based on the precautionary principle, the changing environment related to COVID-19, including recently updated guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), similar work in other health care jurisdictions, and uncertainty related to the ongoing nature of the pandemic, including the emergence of the Omicron variant.

As with the previous Joint Statement, this update acknowledges that the physical safety, psychological safety and mental health of health care workers are all equally important.

## **Understanding the Updated Statement**

The statement continues to be an important part of our partnership with our unions, as we continue to build trust and collaboration in our response to COVID-19. It continues to apply to all health workers within AHS and Covenant Health regardless of classification.

It is important to note that under the updated joint statement, there is increased emphasis on the use of N95 respirators in identified scenarios.

The updated joint statement also includes sample considerations for health care workers when performing their required Point of Care Risk Assessment (PCRA) or their assessment of all known and foreseeable risks and hazards.

## **Intent of specific provisions**

- **Section 1: Access** - Focuses on access and availability of all appropriate PPE. Managers must ensure adequate supply is readily available to meet the needs as determined by the requirements of the updated joint statement and health care workers' PCRA's. In the event that immediate access to a health care worker's PPE of choice is not possible, the parties will discuss how to expedite access. Health care worker requests to utilize an N95 respirator or approved equivalent shall not be denied or discouraged.
- **Section 2: PCRA** - Conveys the trust and confidence that we have in our workforce, as well as the expectation that both professional judgement and common sense will be exercised in decisions made following the PCRA. The joint statement includes sample considerations for

health care workers when they are assessing the intended task, patient factors and the nature of the environment when conducting their required PCRA/hazard assessment. If a health care worker does not feel that they are able to assess the situation adequately, then an N95 respirator should be used.

- **Section 3: Minimum PPE Requirements -**

- All clinical and non-clinical health care workers who enter the room/space or are within two meters of a patient with suspected, presumed, or confirmed COVID-19 will wear a fit-tested N95 respirator, or approved equivalent protection, gown, gloves, and eye protection.
- In settings such as emergency departments, intensive and critical care units, COVID-19 units and units with a COVID-19 outbreak, all clinical and non-clinical health care workers will wear an N95 respirator.
- There may be situations in the first two bullets above, where a health care worker, based upon their PCRA or their assessment of all known and foreseeable risks and hazards, may choose to wear a medical mask instead of an N95 respirator.
- Aerosol Generating Medical Procedures (AGMPs) – Fit-tested and seal-checked N95 respirators or approved equivalent protection must be used by all health care workers in the room where AGMPs are being performed, or when frequent or unexpected exposure to AGMPs is anticipated, or with any intubated patients suspected or confirmed to have a viral respiratory infection.
- EMS personnel are required to wear N95 respirators in all ground and air ambulances.
- For all other areas of health care delivery, there may be situations where a health care worker, based on their PCRA, including their assessment of all known and foreseeable risks and hazards, may choose to wear an N95 respirator.

- **Section 4: PPE Supply –** Commits to frequently review supply availability with our unions and the collaborative development of timely contingency plans, should they be required.

- **Issue Resolution**

- Access and use of PPE, including use of fit-tested N95 respirators, based on this joint statement or a health care workers PCRA shall not be denied or discouraged.
- In the extremely rare event of any denial or lack of availability of PPE, it shall be reported as follows:
  - AHS Employees: in MySafetyNet
  - Covenant Employees: Occupational Health and Safety Reporting Line 1-855-342-8070
  - Additionally, this shall be reviewed by the applicable Joint Workplace Health and Safety Committee.
- The union Provincial OHS representatives have a provincial contact within each organization for expedited dispute resolution.
- A single AHS representative has been assigned as a contact for the union OHS representatives in order to facilitate timely resolution of any disputes related to the application of the joint statement.

- **Additional Information and Support**

- If employees have any questions regarding the proper PPE to use in a specific circumstance, please contact your supervisor and/or your union OH&S representative.
- If leaders have any questions regarding the PPE Joint Statement and its application, please contact your WHS Advisor.