

COVID-19 Risk Level and Selection of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Guidelines

During an outbreak, the risk of occupational exposure to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, may vary from very high to low risk. The level of risk depends in part on the industry, type of work performed, and the need for direct physical contact or repeated or extended time within 6 feet in proximity to people known to be, or suspected of being infected with SARS-CoV2. To help employers determine appropriate precautions, Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) has adopted the [OSHA Occupational Risk](#) levels to characterize work. These risk levels range from low to very high.

While engineering and administrative controls are considered more effective in minimizing exposure to SARS-CoV-2, PPE may also be needed to prevent certain exposures. While correctly using PPE can help prevent some exposures, it should not take the place of other prevention strategies.

All types of PPE must be:

- Selected based upon the hazard to the worker.
- Properly fitted and periodically refitted, as applicable (e.g., respirators).
- Consistently and properly worn when required.
- Regularly inspected, maintained, and replaced, as necessary.
- Properly removed, cleaned, and stored or disposed of, as applicable, to avoid contamination of self, others, or the environment.

The most important things we can all do to limit the spread of illness are to:

- Stay home when you are sick and avoid close contact with others.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If water is not available, use hand sanitizer, with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your mouth/nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing. Immediately throw the tissue in the garbage.
- Practice social distancing - Keep at least six feet between yourself and others as much as possible.

Employees who have concerns about the Novel Coronavirus and COVID-19 may consult the [COVID-19 Resources and Updates](#) webpage for further information and guidance.

COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Risk Level Summary

| Risk Level | Risk Description | Job Role / Activity | PPE |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|
| Very High | Jobs with a high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19 during specific medical, post-mortem or laboratory procedures. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthcare workers performing aerosol generating activities Morgue workers COVID-19 research personnel | Respirator (N95 or PAPR) Disposable gown Safety glasses or chemical goggles Face shield or surgical mask (extends N95 life) Disposable gloves |
| High | Jobs with a high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19. No aerosol generating procedures performed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthcare or laboratory personnel collecting/handling specimens from known or suspected COVID-19 patients Clinical Care (e.g., medical, dental, veterinary) and Support Medical Transport (ambulance/airlift operators) Mortuary Workers OSP Police (close contact with suspected COVID positive individuals) Public Safety (close contact with suspected COVID positive individuals) Maintenance in COVID-19 suspected Student Housing | Surgical masks or respirator (N95, cartridge-style respirator, or PAPR) Disposable gloves Disposable gown Safety glasses or chemical goggles Face shield (extends N95 life) |
| Medium | Jobs that require frequent/close contact with people who may be infected, but who are not known to be infected. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Service Medical Facility Screeners and Admit Housing Hall Desks Cashiers | Surgical masks Disposable gloves |
| | In areas where there is ongoing community transmission, workers in this category may have contact with the general public (e.g., schools, high-population-density work environments, some high-volume retail settings). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transportation Shuttle Drivers (passenger assist) | Disposable gloves Surgical mask or N95 (voluntary use) Face shield or chemical goggles Disposable gown (optional) |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Custodial enhanced disinfection for a known or suspected COVID location | Disposable gloves Disposable gown Safety goggles or face shield (splash potential) Surgical mask (required if in COVID-positive housing) or N95 (voluntary use) |
| Lower Risk (Caution) | <p>Jobs that do not require contact with people known to be or suspected to be infected.</p> <p>Workers in this category have minimal occupational contact with the public and other coworkers.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Custodians Maintenance (including FOMS) Utility and Infrastructure Transportation Shuttle Drivers Security Guards Laboratory Staff Animal Care Staff Mail Services | Surgical mask offered (close contact) * |

* **Close contact** is defined as being within approximately 6 feet of another person for a prolonged period of time (i.e., more than a few minutes).

Resources / References: [OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#), [University of Washington COVID-19 Health and Safety Resources](#)