

What is Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

PPE is clothing and equipment that is worn to protect you from workplace hazards, including spreading infections.

PPE helps break the *mode of transmission* in the chain of infection.

Which PPE you need to wear will depend on your workplace and the risk of infection. It may include gloves, gowns or aprons, masks or respirators or protective eyewear.

A **surgical mask** is a disposable mask with three layers of filtering material and a nose wire. It is usually secured with ear loops.

A **respirator** ('P2' or 'N95') is a special type of mask, close fitting, with high filtration. It has elastic straps around the back of the head. It stops air coming in around the edges and only works properly if the seal is tight against your face, this is why you need to do a *fit check* every time you put one on. Each wearer should be *fit tested* to find the respirator that fits the shape and size of your face and seals properly.

Putting on (donning) and taking off (doffing) PPE

Donning and doffing stations are where clean PPE is accessed and used PPE is disposed of. These areas should be at least 1.5 metres apart and with enough space, so you will not brush against any surfaces or people.

Posters should be displayed to show you the correct order to don and doff your PPE. Following the correct order is important, particularly when doffing as there is a high risk for contaminating yourself, pay attention to hand hygiene at each step!

Before you begin, make sure:

- you know what PPE you need
- there is hand sanitiser
- you know where you will take off your PPE
- you eat, drink and have been to the toilet before you put on full PPE

A PPE buddy is a workmate who helps check your PPE when you don and doff. If you do not have a buddy, use a mirror.

The video in the module and on the webpage takes you through the steps for donning and doffing.



PPE dos and don'ts

Do

- Change your PPE if it is wet, dirty or damaged
- Change your mask every 4 hours
- Change gloves and hand hygiene between each patient/ resident or between each procedure
- Wash a cloth mask after each wear
- Ensure the mask fully covers your nose and mouth
- Perform hand hygiene before and after removing any PPE
- Wear gloves when you are touching blood, body fluids, used PPE or contaminated waste.

Do not

- Reuse single-use items. Only some PPE can be reused such as some face shields and goggles. These should be cleaned according to Department of Health guidelines
- Touch the front of the mask
- Wear a mask under your chin, hanging off one ear, on your arm or on your head
- Use vinyl gloves if you are providing health care or close personal care.
- Perform hand hygiene with your gloves on.

This is a summary of the *PPE* module in the Department of Health's Infection Prevention and Control eLearning series. Access this and other modules in the series at www.vicniss.org.au/resources/ipc-elearning-modules/

