



Chester County Health Department

The Chester County Health Department, supporting the COVID-19 response in both Chester County and Delaware County, is issuing the following health alert for healthcare providers regarding: **Conservation of Personal Protective Equipment.**

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is a critical infection control measure to protect healthcare personnel (HCP), along with minimizing chance for exposures, engineering controls, and appropriate environmental cleaning. Additional guidance may be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html>.

COVID-19 is transmitted by respiratory droplets, which means for routine care, HCP should use contact and droplet precautions, including a regular face mask, eye protection, gown, and gloves. N-95 respirators are **not** needed for routine care of patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. However, certain procedures may generate aerosols, including tracheal intubation, non-invasive ventilation, tracheotomy, cardiopulmonary respiration, manual ventilation before intubation, and bronchoscopy. For these procedures, airborne precautions, including N95 respirators or the equivalent, are advised. It is unclear whether specimen collection via nasopharyngeal or oropharyngeal swabs may generate aerosols, so we have recommended airborne precautions for this. Details may be found at https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331498/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPCPPE_use-2020.2-eng.pdf

Shortages of PPE are widespread across the world and we anticipate continued difficulty obtaining supplies. We are aware of many jurisdictions in the US running out of PPE already. Use of PPE can be described in three strategies:

- Conventional Capacity - During routine operations, we operate under conventional capacity use, which means no change in daily practices.
- Contingency Capacity - Practices which change daily practice to conserve PPE, but do not impact the safety of HCP or the care delivered to the patient.

- Crisis Capacity - During shortages, measures taken which may not meet standards of care.

At this time in Chester County and Delaware County, we are not aware of any hospitals in crisis capacity mode. However, **ALL hospitals and healthcare providers must immediately use contingency capacity measures** if they are not already, in order to maintain our ability to protect HCP. The more PPE we conserve now, the more we can delay, and perhaps avoid, crisis strategies. Contingency measures include:

1. Use physical barriers - glass or plastic windows between patients and HCP at intake desks, triage stations, pharmacy pick-up, etc., can eliminate the need for this staff to use PPE.
2. Cohort - grouping patients with COVID-19 together, and designating teams of HCP who interact with them, can minimize the number of people needing PPE.
3. Use expired N95 respirators - many models have been tested and met NIOSH performance standards long past expected shelf life. See <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/release-stockpiled-N95.html> for details.
4. Use alternatives to face masks for source control - Placing a mask on a symptomatic patient can help keep their respiratory droplets from traveling towards HCP. However, any kind of fabric or tissue may be used as source control, which can preserve surgical masks for the protection of HCP. This includes covering the mouth and nose of a patient with their own shirt, hand- or machine-sewn masks, bandanas, etc. Use of these fabric alternatives by HCP has been shown to be less protective than the use of certified/tested surgical face masks, and would only be recommended during crisis capacity.
5. Encourage extended use of N-95 respirators and face masks - This means keeping the same mask/respirator on while caring for different patients, instead of removing and discarding after each encounter. Evidence from prior public health emergencies shows that respirators maintain their protection when used for extended periods. Use of a face shield over the mask/respirator can help reduce surface contamination. HCP must avoid touching the mask/respirator and must perform hand hygiene each time they do. Masks/respirators should be inspected and discarded if soiled or damaged.
6. Reuse eye protection - Clean and disinfect goggles or face shields between uses. Eye protection should be inspected and discarded if damaged.
7. Use cloth gowns which may be safely laundered and reused, or consider extended use of disposable gowns. Disposable gowns which become soiled or soaked should be discarded immediately.

Consider protocols now for re-use of face masks and N-95 respirators now, before it is needed. Explore whether ultraviolet germicidal irradiation is an option to safely implement re-use, such as this protocol:

<https://www.nebraskamed.com/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19/n-95-decon-process.pdf> Consider whether you are interested in receiving donations, such as through GetUsPPE.org.

For Hospitals

If you have an unmet a need for resources, and you have exhausted your internal resource acquisition process, you may submit a resource request through your local emergency management agency. This process of for critical needs, meaning that the PPE is required for continued operations and you anticipate running out of supplies in the next 5 days, Please do not make requests for future planning initiatives

For Chester County Facilities:

Contact your local Municipal Emergency Management Coordinator who will provide you with information to submit your request.

Link to list of Chester County Local Emergency Management Coordinators:
<https://www.chesco.org/2508/Municipal-EMCs>

For Delaware County Facilities:

Contact Delaware County Emergency Management Coordinator at
delcologistics@co.delaware.pa.us

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https://chesterco.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9BwMAAtMeyzmolLj