



Facemask Considerations for Healthcare Professionals in Schools

This document is NOT a substitute for nursing judgment and does not dictate an exclusive course of action. State and district laws and policies should be followed.

Below you will find some guidance provided by the CDC regarding use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health care professionals. School nurses are health care professionals working in schools.

Below is interim guidance from the CDC on suspected and/or confirmed cases of COVID-19 regarding Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

Updated PPE recommendations for the care of patients with known or suspected COVID-19:

- Based on local and regional situational analysis of PPE supplies, facemasks are an acceptable alternative when the supply chain of respirators cannot meet the demand. During this time, available respirators should be prioritized for procedures that are likely to generate respiratory aerosols, which would pose the highest exposure risk to HCP.
 - Facemasks protect the wearer from splashes and sprays.
 - Respirators, which filter inspired air, offer respiratory protection.
- When the supply chain is restored, facilities with a respiratory protection program should return to use of respirators for patients with known or suspected COVID-19. Facilities that do not currently have a respiratory protection program, but care for patients infected with pathogens for which a respirator is recommended, should implement a respiratory protection program.

CDC's guidance on how to optimize the supply of N95 Respirators in the following ways:

- N95 respirators are the personal protective equipment (PPE) most often used to control exposures to infections transmitted via the airborne route, though their effectiveness is highly dependent upon proper fit and use. [The optimal way to prevent airborne transmission is to use a combination of interventions from across the hierarchy of controls, not just PPE alone.](#) Applying a combination of controls can provide an additional degree of protection, even if one intervention fails or is not available.
- Respirators, when required to protect healthcare personnel (HCP) from airborne contaminants such as infectious agents, must be used in the context of a comprehensive, written respiratory protection program that meets the requirements of



[OSHA's Respiratory Protection](#) . The program should include medical evaluations, training, and fit testing.

Along with appropriate PPE usage, NASN encourages you and your school community to continue to promote good handwashing, practicing social distancing— as appropriate, covering of coughs and sneezes, and to stay home when ill or exhibiting cold-like symptoms to minimize the risk of the flu and COVID-19.

Guidance to school nurses seeking facemask protection in their schools:

School nurses are HCP working in the school setting. As healthcare professionals, it is important that if your school remains open during this pandemic or re-opens afterwards, that you advocate with your school administrators to provide you with the appropriate PPE needed to keep you and your school community safe in the health office.

If you determine a facemask would be most appropriate for you to wear given that your student population cannot wear a facemask properly (e.g. preschool, prek-2 years-4 years old, medically complex etc.), then NASN encourages you to work with your school leadership to get facemasks provided for you in your health office. If the risk of exposure to COVID-19 is high in your geographic location, then NASN encourages you to reach out and collaborate with your school administrators, local health department, or other local health organizations to see if they have a comprehensive fit testing program, if an N95 facemask is applicable.

Per CDC, N95 respirator use by HCP have to be used in the context of a comprehensive, written respiratory protection program that meets the requirements of [OSHA's Respiratory Protection](#), the program should include medical evaluations, training, and fit testing.

NASN does not recommend school nurses purchasing N95 masks without getting properly fitted by an approved respiratory protection program.

Through the [National Association of County and City Health Officials \(NACCHO\) you can find a local health department in your area](#) to reach out for guidance on this use of facemasks and PPE in your school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collaborate with School Administrators and your Local Health Department:

- Share with school leaders [CDC's definition of HCP](#)
 - HCP refers to all paid and unpaid persons serving in healthcare settings who have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials, including body substances; contaminated medical supplies, devices,

and equipment; contaminated environmental surfaces; or contaminated air.

[Learn more information from the CDC's interim guidance and how they classify HCP.](#)

- While schools are not currently identified as “healthcare settings”, as HCP school nurses are working inside of a school building providing healthcare services. During the performance of those services there is a level of risk associated with direct or indirect contact to students and/or staff members, environmental surfaces, bodily fluids that might be considered contaminated or infectious during this time.
- Provide a list of PPE that is needed to minimize the risk of transmission of bodily fluids.
- Coordinate with local health department to determine if there is any additional training and/or PPE training that you need to have to prevent contamination by bodily fluids during this time.

CDC Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, March 12). Interim guidance for administrators of US K-12 schools and childcare programs. *Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, March 10). Interim infection prevention and control recommendations for patients with suspected or confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Healthcare Settings. *Resources for the Community*, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, March 3). Reducing stigma. *Symptoms and Testing*, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/reducing-stigma.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Frelated-stigma.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, February 29). Strategies for optimizing the supply of N95 respirators. *Healthcare Professionals*, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/respirators-strategy/index.html>