

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Infection Control and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Part of the **APS Investigator Toolkit for COVID-19** located at <https://apstarc.acl.gov/Toolkits>.

Introduction

The safety of personnel can have a noticeable impact on the ability of programs to provide services to the adults who need them most. Adult Protective services (APS) work can involve personal risk, especially for APS staff conducting investigations. The commitment to worker safety is to maintain a safe work environment with a focus on prevention.

The workforce consists of staff whose work environment may be an office setting, home office, and/or in the field. The work environment therefore includes the worker's home office, licensed or unlicensed facilities, and other public or private places. Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, questions, answers, and resources regarding infection control practices and personal protective equipment (PPE) are addressed in this brief. APS workers should follow state APS program and employer guidance regarding investigations and visits with client during all phases of the pandemic.

Prevention Questions

Question

What prevention efforts should we incorporate for our offices?

Answer

Utilize workplace initiatives designed to promote good infection control practices. Suggestions include:

- Regular office cleaning and disinfecting.
- Supplies for hand washing and reminders of hand washing protocols.
- Office locations (non-home based) limit number of staff in the office each day to facilitate the recommended social distancing of six feet.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Health and Human Services (HHS) Occupational Safety and Health Administration [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#).

Check CDC resources often for important updates.

- Promote frequent and thorough hand washing, including by providing workers, customers, and worksite visitors with a place to wash their hands. If soap and running water are not immediately available, provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Encourage workers to stay home if they are sick.
- Encourage respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes with the elbow.

- Provide customers and the public with tissues and trash receptacles.
- Discourage workers from using other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible.
- Maintain regular housekeeping practices, including routine cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces, equipment, and other elements of the work environment. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for use of all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, PPE).

Question

What types of information may we gather during intake that will help to keep APS staff safe?

Answer

Ask the caller if they know of any recent infectious disease outbreaks, such as COVID-19, of the client or people living in the client's home. Inquire about visitors who may have been sick. If the caller believes that there are recent illnesses and exposures, indicate this information on the intake form as "suspected but unconfirmed".

As follow-up to the caller's statements, confirm with public health staff as to their knowledge of COVID-19 illnesses in the client's home or immediate community. Highlight or flag COVID-19 alerts on the intake form or in the documentation system so that the APS staff are aware of the status. If no feature to flag the infection exists in your system, follow-up the intake submission with an email alerting parties to the status.

Provide guidance to APS staff regarding protocols for visits to homes with known infectious disease outbreaks.

Resources

Discuss options with technology staff or vendor for adding a question and response field on the intake form for information related to an infection disease outbreak such as COVID-19. Consider adding a field that confirms whether the information was verified by a public health entity.

Question

Should APS staff be tested for COVID-19?

Answer

If a staff person has [symptoms of COVID-19](#) they should call their health provider or local public health authority to seek advice about testing. Staff should use their best judgement in deciding when to be tested or not to be tested based on their work, family, and community activities.

APS staff need to [take extra precautions](#) if they are more susceptible to developing infectious diseases. They should discuss with their health care provider whether they should be conducting in-person investigations. APS staff should share their concerns and medical advice regarding in-person visits with their supervisor.

If a staff person does not have any symptoms of infection, they should still take preventive measures when visiting with clients so as not to unintentionally spread the virus (e.g., always wearing a mask).

Resources

Centers for Disease Control [Testing for COVID-19](#) guidance. CDC describes the types of tests and

provides guidance for who should be tested. The CDC site directs you to state specific links for guidance from state public health departments. The availability of tests for COVID-19 varies widely by state and territory.

Check CDC resources often for important updates.

CDC guidance regarding test results:

- If you test positive for COVID-19 by a viral test, know what protective steps to take [if you are sick or caring for someone](#).
- If you test negative for COVID-19 by a viral test, you probably were not infected at the time your sample was collected. However, that does not mean you will not get sick. The test result only means that you did not have COVID-19 at the time of testing.
- If you test positive or negative for COVID-19, no matter the type of test, you still should take preventive measures to [protect yourself and others](#).

Field Safety Questions

Field safety practices include:

- Daily notification to supervisor of beginning and end of workday.
- Notification to supervisor of changes to the schedule.
- Itinerary for the day including client addresses.
- Choice of vehicle or public transportation being used.

This information is important not only for the APS staff's personal safety but to aid public health if needed in the tracking of infectious diseases such as COVID-19 exposure.

Question

What products are considered Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and should APS staff use them?

Answer

PPE recommendations for **healthcare personnel working directly with a person with COVID-19** include gowns, gloves, and respirators. For non-direct healthcare personnel, it is recommended that a face mask be worn in public places that you are not able to maintain a physical distance of six feet.

Resources

The CDC information on [Personal Protective Equipment: Questions and Answers](#). The [US Department of Labor](#) Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) information on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and needed training. Also consult your local health authority for additional guidance specific to your area.

Question

Should APS staff wear PPE that is recommended for healthcare personnel when visiting clients with COVID-19?

Answer

APS staff are encouraged to wear a face mask (surgical or cloth) while maintaining a physical distance of at least six feet when talking with clients. APS staff typically do not provide direct care or assistance for clients. As always, follow the guidance of your employer and/or local health authority.

Resources

CDC [Recommendation Regarding the Use of Cloth Face Coverings, Especially in Areas of Significant Community-Based Transmissions](#).

Check CDC resources often for important updates.

Question

Does a cloth mask work just as well as other types of masks? What about masks with clear plastic, at least around lips, so that people who are hard of hearing and lip-readers can better understand us?

Answer

CDC [Recommendation Regarding the Use of Cloth Face Coverings, Especially in Areas of Significant Community-Based Transmissions](#).

Check CDC resources often for important updates.

- Textile (cloth) covers that are intended to keep the person wearing one from spreading respiratory secretions when talking, sneezing, or coughing.
- Face masks are often referred to as surgical masks or procedure masks. Face masks that are not regulated by FDA, such as some procedure masks, which are typically used for isolation purposes, may not provide protection against splashes and sprays.
- Any visitors that are permitted (in Long-Term Care Facilities) must wear a face covering while in the building and restrict their visit to the resident's room or other location designated by the facility.

Advocates for people who are hard of hearing or deaf suggest masks that show the wearer's lips to accommodate people who lip-read. Some advocacy

organizations for people with dementia suggest these masks also because it may be less confusing for the person with dementia if they can see more of your face. At this time, CDC does not provide any guidance on this type of mask.

Resources

CDC's [Preparing for COVID-19: Long-Term Care Facilities, Nursing Homes](#) and [Considerations When Preparing for COVID-19 in Assisted Living Facilities](#).

Question

Regardless of what type of PPE that staff wear, what training should we provide regarding the proper use, cleaning and/or disposing of PPE?

Answer

Seek guidance from public health officials about what PPE may be needed for staff visiting with clients that have positive COVID-19 diagnoses or other communicable diseases. Ask public health staff if they have time and staff available to provide the training to APS. If public health staff are not available currently due to their work responsibilities, ask for references for health care practitioners knowledgeable in PPE. In addition, many webinars for best practices related to the donning, wearing, and removal of face masks and other protective equipment are available.

Resources

CDC guidance: Ensure that *health care personnel* are educated, trained, and have practiced the appropriate use of personal protective equipment prior to caring for a patient, including attention to correct use of PPE and prevention of contamination of clothing, skin, and the environment during the

process of removing such equipment. CDC [STRIVE Infection Control Training](#) are course offerings that many hospital personnel have obtained.

If the state APS program recommends that in some specific situations (for example, if you know the client has tested positive for COVID-19 or another communicable disease) staff use health care personnel PPE, then APS staff should receive training from a trained and knowledgeable person. Additionally, some PPE requires “fitting” that is custom to the wearer which should be provided by a professional. Consider contacting the public health agency and hospital corporations to ask for referrals or assistance in locating a trainer certified in PPE use and infection control practices. If other community service programs or organizations are organizing an infection control training for their staff, ask if the APS staff may attend also.

If the state APS program, recommends that for most circumstances staff should wear, at a minimum, face masks (non-health care personnel PPE), it is still suggested that workers receive infection control training.

Question

Are there suggestions for the best options for purchasing masks and other related items?

Answer

The state APS program should consider the option of bundled purchases with other entities such as the state emergency management agency, public health department, human services department (child protective services), and state unit on aging. Buying in bulk may reduce the costs of the items, ensure a ready supply, and possibly allow for storage or order-on-demand.

The APS TARC Blog post, [Pandemic Resources for APS](#) may be helpful in your decision making. A few excerpts:

- The President declared a national emergency because of the coronavirus pandemic.
- If your state has received an emergency declaration, FEMA along with the state emergency management authority are the leaders. The greatest influencers within the state will likely be the governor, public health director, emergency manager, and National Guard commander. FEMA funds may be used by the state to purchase personal protective equipment (PPE). Prioritization of PPE is given to hospitals, health care facilities, and nursing homes. You may be able to do a joint order of supplies with another program or agency with a state-approved vendor.
- Before purchasing PPE such as surgical masks or respirators make sure that the vendor has the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval.

Resources

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) [listing of states emergency declarations for COVID-19](#).
- Information from the Administration for Community Living (ACL) regarding [CARES Act](#) grants to support older adults and people with disabilities.
- The [Food and Drug Administration](#) (FDA) regulates personal protective equipment such as masks and respirators.

Question

We are planning to order disposable surgical masks, gloves, sanitizing wipes,

hand sanitizer, and plastic storage bags for use by our APS staff. How much should we order?

Answer

These variables should be considered before placing an order:

- Number of APS staff
- Average number of monthly investigations and client visitations
- Average of 20 working days a month, multiplied by the number of months
- Shipping (multiple locations or one), and storage or on-demand ordering

Assumptions are that one worker would wear one mask per home visit and one pair of gloves. After wearing the mask and gloves, they would be placed in a plastic storage bag for disposal. Review product descriptions to determine the number of items in each box or container.

Question

We are planning on ordering some PPE recommended for healthcare personnel to be used only when certain criteria are met and then only when staff are trained in the proper use of the equipment. How should we determine how many sets of healthcare personnel PPE is adequate?

Answer

Take into consideration the following:

- Centralized or decentralized program
- Number of program offices
- Number of staff
- State geography (urban, rural, and frontier)
- Respirators and face shields, when cleaned properly after each use, or reusable. Gowns and gloves are not reusable after one use.
- Costs of equipment

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