Interim COVID-19 Guidance for PPE Use for School Nurses

School nurses are essential healthcare personnel (HCP) in the community working on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic in schools. This guidance is directed at school nurses and who provide care for children in K-12 schools. During the performance of those services, there is risk of infection due to contact with students and/or staff members or contaminated environmental surfaces. School nurses should adhere to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance regarding personal protective equipment (PPE) use for healthcare professionals.

This document does NOT substitute for nursing judgment and acknowledges that courses of action may be modified on a case-by-case basis. This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of COVID-19 and is subject to change as additional information is known.

Use of PPE in School Settings

It is expected that students with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 will be released to go home as quickly as possible. This guidance addresses care that must be provided while awaiting transportation when it is necessary to be in close contact (within six feet for 10 minutes or longer).

Schools should ensure that school nurses managing sick employees or students are appropriately protected from exposure. See What Healthcare Personnel Should Know About Caring for Patients with Confirmed or Possible COVID-19 Infection.

- Only designated, trained staff should interact with people showing symptoms of COVID-19. At least one designated, trained staff member should be available at all times in case there is a need to isolate a symptomatic employee or student. When providing care for anyone with suspected or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection, HCPs who need to be within 6 feet of a sick colleague or student should be provided appropriate PPE (including gloves, a gown, a face shield or goggles, and an N95 or equivalent or higher-level respirator or a surgical mask if a respirator is not available), and follow Standard and Transmission-Based Precautions.

School nurses should be familiar with the general recommendations for all school employees as outlined in the CDC's Strategies for Protecting K-12 School Staff from COVID-19 and Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Healthcare Personnel During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic.

Factors to consider when selecting PPE:

- Type of exposure anticipated—This is determined by the type of anticipated exposure, such as touch, splashes or sprays, or large volumes of blood, body fluids, or other potentially infectious material that might penetrate the clothing.
- Durability and appropriateness for the task—This is linked to the type of exposure anticipated, (i.e. use of PPE when caring for a student complaining of abdominal pain versus a student presenting with COVID-19 symptoms).

Respiratory Treatments

During this COVID-19 pandemic, asthma treatments using inhalers with spacers (with or without face mask) are preferred over nebulizer treatments whenever possible. Nebulizer treatments at school should be reserved for students who cannot use or do not have access to an inhaler (with or without spacer or facemask).

Based on limited available data, it is uncertain whether aerosols generated from some procedures may be infectious, such as:

- nebulizer administration*
- high flow O2 delivery

*Aerosols generated by nebulizers are derived from medication in the nebulizer. It is uncertain whether potential associations between performing this common procedure and increased risk of infection might be due to aerosols generated by the procedure or due to increased contact between those administering the nebulized medication and infected patients.

Use of peak flow meters, including in the school setting, includes forceful exhalation. Based on limited available data, forceful exhalation is not considered an aerosol-generating procedure associated with increased risk of transmitting the virus that causes COVID-19. However, for some people with asthma, using a peak flow meter can trigger cough.

PPE Supply Optimization

While schools are typically working with an essentially healthy population, occasions arise, particularly for school health personnel, where PPE use is required, e.g., during symptom screening, physical assessment, health care procedure, or for cleaning and disinfection of spaces. If supplies of PPE become low schools should be aware of conservation or reuse measures such as:

- Shifting from disposable PPE to reusable PPE (e.g. reusable eye protection including goggles and face shields and cloth isolation gowns).
- Implementing extended use policies for eye protection, facemasks, and N95s.
- Utilizing expired PPE for fit testing and providing training in donning and doffing.

More information on PPE supply optimization can be found at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/index.html.

Resources

CDC Covid-19 Schools and Child Care Programs

National Association of School Nurses COVID-19 Resources

NJDOH COVID-19 Information for Schools

Recommended PPE by Task Classification

Scenario	Cloth Face Covering (not PPE)	Gloves	Eye Protection	Surgical Mask	Gown	N95 (or equivalent or higher-level respirator)	Comments
Low Risk: *Sitting at desk, walking around building; no close contact with students or staff*	**X**						
Moderate Risk: *Tasks that require close contact (within 6 feet) with someone who is not known or suspected to have COVID-19*		**X** situation dependent	**X** situation dependent	**X**			*These precautions are recommended since some people with the disease may be asymptomatic. Although there is risk with these tasks, not all PPE listed may be needed for all situations (for example, medication administration, first aid, blood glucose checks)*
High Risk: *Tasks that include physical assessment of anyone suspected of having COVID-19*		**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	*N95 or equivalent or higher-level respirators are preferred, however a surgical mask would be considered appropriate in most situations if a respirator is not available*
Highest Risk: *Aerosol-generating procedure (nebulizer treatment)*		**X**	**X**		**X**	**X**	*N95 or equivalent or higher-level respirator is needed*