

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

BULLETIN #2 - URGENT

APRIL 8, 2020

MINISTRY OF HEALTH DIRECTION

USE OF ALTERNATE/EQUIVALENT PPE AND N95 REPROCESSING

DIRECTION FROM MINISTRY OF HEALTH

The safety of health care workers is critical to BC’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The health system must diligently and deliberately conserve, preserve, extend, manage, monitor, and utilize PPE supplies appropriately to ensure the continued availability of these items.

The Ministry of Health and PHSA Supply Chain are working to ensure that medical supplies and PPE are being managed across the health care system by prioritizing distribution to ensure availability. The focus is currently on conserving PPE while actively acquiring additional supply through any available avenues.

Despite significant disruptions to global and domestic supply chains, our efforts to meet frontline needs for PPE have been effective. To ensure that the health system continues to have a supply of PPE, the Ministry of Health is enacting contingencies to address the possibility that the supply of PPE becomes more constrained.

Two specific contingencies being pursued are:

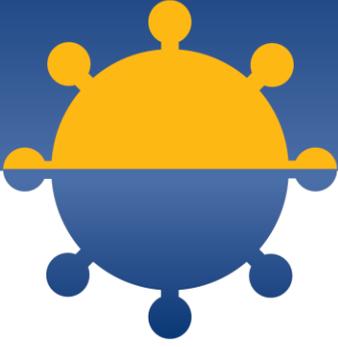
1. Procurement of safe and effective alternative PPE that is sourced through newly developed relationships with international manufacturers; and
2. Reprocessing of N95 respirators.

Alternative/Equivalent PPE

There are many standards for PPE that are used by jurisdictions internationally to define the performance of PPE, such as the EN European standards. BC’s current expanded procurement activities assess these standards against those used in BC. If these standards are equivalent, as advised by a Health Authority PPE expert group, those supplies are ordered by Supply Chain.

Once supplies arrive in BC they are assessed to ensure that the items procured meet required standards. All PPE put into circulation in BC’s health care system is required to meet following assessments and standards:

- Respiratory Protection: National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) or equivalencies as outlined in the WorkSafeBC Occupational Health and Safety Regulation Guideline;



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- Masks: American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) Barrier Protection standards;
- Gowns: Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation (AAMI) barrier; performance and classification standards;
- Gloves: ASTM, EN, FDA, and/or ISO standards and certifications;
- Health Canada standards and regulations; and/or
- WorkSafeBC Occupational Health and Safety Regulation; and/or
- Testing to validate the functionality and efficacy of PPE against industry performance standards.

Some PPE, such as the N95 respirator requires fit testing to ensure that it appropriately protects the worker. This fit testing is done by Workplace Health/Occupational Health and Safety to WorkSafeBC Regulation. The fit testing process also provides the opportunity for health care workers to understand how to properly don, use, and doff the device.

Reprocessing of N95 Respirators

As a contingency for a scenario where N95 respirators become unavailable through global supply chains, the Ministry of Health is directing that all health authorities, long-term care facilities, and assisted living facilities collect used N95 respirators that are not soiled or damaged for reprocessing.

Working with Infection Prevention and Control experts, Medical Device Reprocessing experts, mask manufacturers, and Health Canada, the Ministry of Health is piloting an initiative to reprocess masks for potential reuse by healthcare workers during the COVID-19 response. Used masks will be reprocessed and sterilized using the STERRAD system. Previous to COVID-19 the STERRAD sterilization technique has been used widely to sterilize medical devices.

Reprocessed respirators are marked as reprocessed, inspected and assessed to ensure they meet NIOSH/Health Canada and WorkSafeBC requirements before they are stockpiled. Reprocessed masks will be stockpiled and only used in a circumstance where new N95s or equivalent respirators are not available.

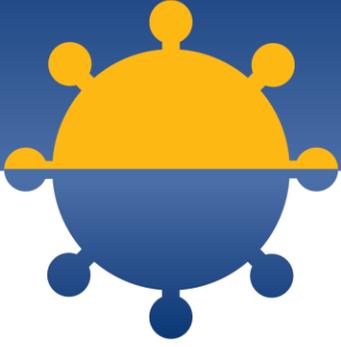
Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have been developed by Vancouver Coastal Health Authority to guide reprocessing procedures. Please see the attached SOPs for more information on the process and direction on how to safely collect and handle used N95 respirators.

For More Information:

NIOSH PPE Standards: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/ppe/default.html>

Health Canada PPE Standards: <https://buyandsell.gc.ca/specifications-for-COVID-19-products#100>

WorkSafe BC PPE Standards: <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/health-safety/tools-machinery->



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STERRAD Systems: <https://www.sterradsterilityguide.com/>