



Acute Hospital Infection Prevention and Control Precautions for Possible or

Confirmed COVID-19 in a Pandemic Setting

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| 2.5 | 17.08.2021 | Deletion of records of changes in previous versions Alignment of appendix 2 with COVID-19 Normalising visiting in long term residential care facilities guidance Terminology change to “fully vaccinated” throughout Clarification of Contact testing Statement that all company representatives and staff working for external contractors in clinical areas should be fully vaccinated Consider additional protective measures for patients admitted who are not fully vaccinated Patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should be care for by staff who are fully vaccinated Addition of guidance on surveillance testing of children and a parent/guardian or carer who may accompany them to hospital Update to doffing of PPE | AMRIC |

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 5 |
| Scope..... | 5 |
| COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) | 6 |
| Transmission of COVID 19 | 6 |
| Transmission in the Healthcare Setting | 8 |
| Vaccination | 9 |
| Testing | 9 |
| Interpretation of results..... | 12 |
| COVID-19 and Pregnancy | 13 |
| COVID-19 and Immunity after Recovery | 13 |
| Survival in the Environment..... | 13 |
| Staff..... | 13 |
| Limiting Exposure of Staff to COVID-19 | 14 |
| Staff movement across facilities | 15 |
| Staff Uniforms/Clothing..... | 16 |
| External Contractors & Product Representatives | 16 |
| Standard Precautions..... | 17 |
| Hand hygiene | 17 |
| Alcohol-based hand rub | 17 |
| Respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette | 17 |
| Safe management of linen (Laundry)..... | 17 |
| Management of blood and body fluid spills | 17 |
| Management of waste | 18 |
| Transmission-based precautions for COVID-19 | 18 |
| Care for Patients in the Acute Setting | 18 |
| Cohorting and Streaming | 18 |
| Patient placement, surveillance & assessment for infection risk..... | 20 |
| COVID-19 Positive Patient Placement for Inpatient Care | 21 |
| Managing a cluster or outbreak of COVID-19 in an Acute Hospital Setting | 22 |
| A suspected case of hospital-acquired COVID-19 in an inpatient..... | 23 |

| | |
|---|----|
| A confirmed case of hospital-acquired COVID-19 on a ward | 25 |
| Specific settings..... | 26 |
| Critical Care Setting..... | 27 |
| Operating theatres..... | 27 |
| Outpatient Department (OPD) or Day Service..... | 28 |
| Radiology | 28 |
| Dialysis | 29 |
| Maternity Units | 31 |
| Acute Mental Health Facilities/Units | 33 |
| Community Hospitals and Post-acute Rehabilitation Facilities | 35 |
| Transfer | 37 |
| Internal Transfer | 37 |
| External Transfer..... | 38 |
| Guidance on the transfer of hospitalised patients from an acute hospital to a residential care facility | 38 |
| Transfer from primary care/community settings using hospital transport systems | 38 |
| Transfer/discharge to home care services..... | 39 |
| Care of the Dying | 40 |
| Care of the Deceased with Confirmed COVID-19 Infection | 40 |
| Autopsy | 40 |
| Communication of level of risk | 40 |
| Hygienic preparation | 40 |
| Transport to the Mortuary of a person deceased during the infectious period | 41 |
| Handling personal possessions of the Deceased | 41 |
| Other Acute Services Supporting Patient Care | 42 |
| Laboratory..... | 42 |
| Point-of-Care /Near Patient Testing..... | 42 |
| Pharmacy | 43 |
| Medication delivery | 43 |
| Medication returns to the Pharmacy..... | 43 |
| Patient Care Equipment/Instruments/Devices | 43 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Mobile healthcare equipment | 44 |
| Mobile Device Use in the Clinical Setting..... | 44 |
| General Environment..... | 46 |
| Routine cleaning | 46 |
| Terminal Cleaning | 47 |
| Unused Medication, Blood Products and PPE | 47 |
| Catering..... | 47 |
| Water coolers..... | 48 |
| Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) | 48 |
| Personal protective equipment (PPE)..... | 48 |
| Extended use of PPE | 49 |
| Types of PPE..... | 50 |
| Recommendations for the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during COVID-19 pandemic | 55 |
| Donning PPE..... | 55 |
| Where to DON PPE | 55 |
| What to do before you put on your PPE..... | 55 |
| Sequence of donning PPE | 56 |
| Doffing PPE..... | 56 |
| Where to doff PPE | 56 |
| Sequence of doffing PPE..... | 56 |
| Duration of Transmission-based Precautions in Acute Hospital..... | 57 |
| Aerosol Generating Procedures | 59 |
| Cleaning an area after an AGP has been performed on a patient with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 | 60 |
| Ventilation | 61 |
| Appendix 1 Preliminary Guidance on Facial Hair & Respiratory Protection..... | 63 |
| Appendix 2 Admissions, transfers and discharges to and from residential care facilities | 65 |
| Appendix 3 Respiratory/Cough Etiquette..... | 74 |
| Appendix 4 Healthcare Risk Waste | 75 |

Introduction

This document replaces the previously issued *Acute Hospital Infection Prevention and Control Precautions for Possible or Confirmed COVID-19 in a Pandemic Setting Version 2.4*.

This document should be used in association with “*V1.2 Interim Guidance on Infection Prevention and Control for the Health Service Executive 2020*”

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/microbiologyantimicrobialresistance/infectioncontrolandhai/guidelines/Interim%20HSE%20Guidance%20on%20IPC.pdf>

In the context of the continuing pandemic, the advent of effective vaccination is a major advance in reducing the harm associated with COVID-19. However, the fundamental principles of basic infection prevention and control (IPC) are still a key part of the defences we have for protecting patients, our colleagues and ourselves from acquiring this disease. Although transmission in hospital in the early months of 2021 was extremely difficult to control the situation has improved greatly. The addition of vaccination to other measures is likely to be a key driver in this change and this shows that it is possible to manage the risk of spread of COVID-19 while maintaining the delivery of timely and appropriate care to the patient.

This document was informed by guidance from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Public Health Wales (PHW), Public Health Agency (PHA) Northern Ireland, Health Protection Scotland (HPS) Public Health England (PHE), European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Colleagues in the HPSC have also contributed to the development and review of this document.

There is variation in detail between national guidance on IPC issued in different countries. Similarly, many specialist societies have issued recommendations, which differ in some details from national or international IPC guidelines. Although differences in detail are a focus of considerable debate and can create a very challenging environment for IPC practice, it is important to focus on the clear consensus on all the most critical aspects of IPC and to continue to work together to manage those areas of difference and to look to emerging evidence to resolve those differences.

Scope

This guidance applies to acute hospitals settings, including community hospitals, acute mental health services and to facilities providing inpatient acute rehabilitation services. It also applies to specialist in-patient palliative care services that have assessed the service they deliver as very similar to that provided in an acute hospital setting. Guidance on visiting in acute hospitals is not addressed in this document, as this is addressed separately. Please see the following link

<https://www.hpsc.ie/az/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/visitorsvisiting/>

Residential care facilities (RCF) where residents are provided with overnight accommodation, including long-term nursing home, long-term mental health residences and shorter-term respite and convalescence care are advised to refer to the Public Health and Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines on the Prevention and Management of COVID-19 Cases and Outbreaks in Residential Care Facilities

<https://www.hpsc.ie/az/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/residentialcarefacilities/>

COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2)

The virus which causes COVID-19 infection is called SARS-CoV-2 and belongs to the broad family of viruses known as coronaviruses. Global efforts to further our understanding of this pathogen have been ongoing since it was first identified in the Wuhan province of China in December 2019.

Please see the HPSC website for the up-to-date [case definition of COVID-19](#).

Transmission of COVID 19

The median incubation period is from five to six days for COVID-19 (range = 1 – 14 days). Individuals are usually considered most infectious to others around the time they develop symptoms. How infectious an individual is and how long they remain infectious is related to some degree to the severity and stage of illness and may be influenced by the immune function of the individual.

The transmission of COVID-19 occurs mainly through liquid respiratory particles. The larger particles can be considered as droplets (larger) and the smaller as aerosols (smaller). The particle sizes form a continuum rather than two discrete categories. In practice the infection prevention and control issue is whether transmission through the air occurs primarily within a short range of space and time of the source (considered to be associated with droplets) or over a long range of space and time (considered as associated with aerosols and airborne transmission).

Respiratory particles are generated from the nose and mouth by actions such as, breathing, coughing, sneezing, talking or laughing. Transmission to others may result from direct impact of infectious droplets on the mucosa of persons in proximity and through contact with surfaces contaminated with infectious respiratory droplets and subsequent transfer of infectious material to the mucous membranes (droplet transmission).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that *“Recent clinical reports of health workers exposed to COVID-19 index cases, not in the presence of aerosol-generating procedures, found no nosocomial transmission when contact and droplet precautions were appropriately used, including the wearing of surgical masks as a component of the personal protective equipment (PPE). These observations suggest that aerosol transmission did not occur in this context. Further studies are needed to determine whether it is possible to detect viable SARS-CoV-2 in air samples from settings where no procedures that generate aerosols are performed and what role aerosols might play in transmission.”* <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/transmission-of-sars-cov-2-implications-for-infection-prevention-precautions> (accessed 29 May 2021). Of note this Scientific Brief was published in July 2020 prior to the emergence of the B.1.1.7 variant.

Transmission by the airborne route (longer range transmission) has been acknowledged since the start of the pandemic in particular in the context of certain medical procedures referred to aerosol generating procedures associated with an increased risk of infection (AGPs). More recently, particularly in the context of the emergence and spread of more infectious virus variants such as B.1.1.7, concern regarding the risk of airborne spread has increased. This is reflected in the April 2021 updated to the WHO website Frequently Asked Questions as follows. *“The virus can spread from an infected person’s mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they cough, sneeze, speak, sing or breathe. These particles range from larger respiratory droplets to smaller aerosols. Current evidence suggests that the virus spreads mainly between people who are in close contact with each other, typically within 1 metre (short-range). A person can be infected when aerosols or droplets containing the virus are inhaled or come directly into contact with the eyes, nose, or mouth. The virus can also spread in poorly ventilated and/or crowded indoor settings, where people tend to spend longer periods of time. This is because aerosols remain suspended in the air or travel farther than 1 metre (long-range). People may also become infected by touching surfaces that have been contaminated by the virus when touching their eyes, nose or mouth without cleaning their hands.”* <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-how-is-it-transmitted> (accessed 29 May 2021).

Recent experience in hospitals in Ireland also highlights particular concerns regarding spread of infection over longer distances from patients supported by high flow oxygen devices (which is a recognised AGP) in particular in multi-bed areas.

Higher levels of virus have been detected in patients with severe illness compared to mild cases. Like influenza, peak levels of virus are generally found around the time of symptom onset. People can be infectious before they develop symptoms (pre-symptomatic spread) and some people who never notice symptoms may be infectious (asymptomatic spread). The overall importance of spread

of infection from pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic people in driving the pandemic remains uncertain.

Transmission in the Healthcare Setting

The spread of COVID-19 in the healthcare setting is a specific concern. Experience in Ireland and elsewhere indicates that transmission in acute hospitals and other healthcare settings occurred very readily when the virus was introduced from the community into the hospital during the period before widespread vaccination. Transmission typically occurs when an unrecognised infectious person (patient, staff or visitor) enters the hospital. Control of entry to minimise risk of unrecognised introduction is therefore a key priority in preventing outbreaks. This requires a particular focus when the rate of infection in the community served is high.

Outbreaks of infection involving both patients and healthcare workers (HCW) were frequent in acute hospitals during the major community surge in COVID-19 in late 2020 and early 2021. The control of spread in acute hospitals in this context was very challenging even with extensive measures in place and the number of hospital acquired cases (probable and definite combined) was very high with a peak of 494 cases in one week in January. Vaccination has played a key part in helping to manage this risk.

The increase in hospital acquired cases may be related in part to the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 variants with higher transmissibility. These include in particular the alpha and more recently the delta variant. Spread of infection from patients who are incubating infection on admission but who are asymptomatic and have undetectable virus on admission was identified as one source of hospital outbreaks. Undetected infection in patients on high flow oxygen devices for respiratory support is a specific concern even when the person on respiratory support is in a single room. Infectious healthcare workers or visitors who do not realise that they are infectious may also be a source of outbreaks. Where cases of COVID-19 are detected promptly and transmission-based IPC precautions, including appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE) are implemented fully, the risk of spread can be reduced. It is therefore important that acute hospital settings have systems in place to monitor the vaccination status of patients, to encourage vaccination to the greatest extent practical and to ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, patients with COVID-19 are rapidly identified at presentation and after admission are cared for with appropriate transmission-based IPC precautions. A self-assessment checklist of measures that have been found useful in controlling and responding to hospital transmission of COVID-19 is here:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/Acute%20Hospital%20Checklist%20for%20COVID-19%20Control%20Measures.pdf>

Particular care is required to ensure to the greatest extent possible that people on high-flow oxygen

or similar respiratory support are accommodated in single rooms or the smallest available multi-bed area even if not suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 infection. They must be monitored carefully for evidence of COVID-19 infection and they should be given priority for surveillance testing for SARS-CoV-2 throughout their hospital stay.

Processes for identification of patients presenting with COVID-19 must take account of the experience that a significant number of patients do not have respiratory symptoms on presentation and some may not have any specific clinical features that point to a diagnosis of COVID-19. Hospital surveillance activities related to COVID-19 should include identifying incidents of late recognition of community-acquired (CA) COVID-19 and identifying cases of hospital-acquired (HA) COVID-19 among patients and HCWs.

Hospitals should review their plans for management of outbreaks of infectious disease, to ensure that they address early detection and rapid response to outbreaks of COVID-19.

Vaccination

Vaccination for COVID-19 began in Ireland in late December 2020. Almost all frontline healthcare workers in the acute hospital sector have now been offered vaccination and most are vaccinated. The impact of vaccination is apparent in a dramatic reduction in the number of new diagnoses of COVID-19 in acute hospital healthcare workers since mid-January. It is clear however that the protection afforded to healthcare workers by vaccination is not absolute; therefore, it remains prudent to avoid intense exposure as much as possible. There is growing evidence that vaccination reduces asymptomatic infection and reduces viral load in those who become infected. Therefore, vaccinated people who become infected are expected to be less infectious. However vaccination does not eliminate the risk of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from healthcare worker to patient in all settings and there is a risk that variants that evade vaccine induced protection may emerge. Therefore, at present it is recommended that even when they have vaccine protection healthcare workers caring for patients should not attend for work if they have symptoms of infection and should adhere to all IPC measures in this guideline in the same way as they did prior to vaccination. This advice will be reviewed regularly on the basis of emerging evidence and experience.

Note: All patients in the acute hospital system who are not fully vaccinated and are eligible for vaccination should be offered vaccine as soon as is practically possible after they are assessed as clinically well enough for vaccination.

Testing

It is useful to distinguish three categories of testing for COVID-19 with respect to people admitted

to healthcare facilities:

1. **Diagnostic testing:** This is testing for COVID-19 in patients where there is a clinical suspicion of COVID-19, based on identified clinical features that suggest a diagnosis of COVID-19 (for example fever, shortness of breath, cough, sudden loss of taste or smell). Refer to the HPSC website for the up-to-date case definition of COVID-19. When diagnostic testing is required, the patient should be cared for with contact and droplet precautions pending the test result. The result should be available as quickly as possible and in any case within 12 hours.
2. **Contact testing:** patients who are identified as contacts of COVID-19. Contacts who are not fully vaccinated, and have not had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months and who must remain in multi-bed areas should be tested every 2 to 3 days throughout the period when they are in multi-bed areas. This should be considered also for patients in single rooms particularly if high flow oxygen devices are in use. Testing of fully vaccinated contacts is not necessary in all cases and if performed consider testing at less frequent intervals.
3. **Surveillance testing:** This is testing for COVID-19 in patients where there is no clinical suspicion of COVID-19 and the person is not a contact. In this case, the patient should generally be cared for with standard precautions PLUS use of a surgical mask, as per NPHET recommendation, pending the test result. However a person supported by high-flow oxygen devices should be cared for in a single room with contact and droplet precautions while awaiting surveillance test results whenever possible.

A surveillance test should be offered to all adult patients, including maternity patients, who are expected to require overnight accommodation in the hospital, with the exceptions of those who were tested in the three days before admission, those who are fully vaccinated and those who have had laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 in the previous 9 months. Testing should be offered as soon as is practical after presentation and in all cases within 24 hours.

Exceptions to the requirement for surveillance testing on admission may also be considered in low risk settings when community transmission rates are low but should be based on documented risk assessment.

In adult patients in a general hospital setting surveillance testing should normally be repeated 2 to 3 days after the initial sample to help identify people who may have been infected on admission but in whom the virus was not detected. This is not required as a routine in those who are fully vaccinated and those who have had laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 in the previous 9 months. Exceptions to the requirement for repeat surveillance testing may also be considered in low risk settings when community transmission rates are low but should be based on documented risk

assessment.

Surveillance testing should be performed on in patients who are in multi-bed areas at 3 day intervals throughout their hospital stay in settings where there is a high community incidence and where incidents of hospital acquired infection and outbreaks are observed despite other controls in place. This is particularly important for patients supported by high-flow oxygen devices or similar respiratory support. This is not required as a routine in those who are fully vaccinated and those who have had laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 in the previous 9 months. Exceptions to the requirement for repeat surveillance testing may also be considered in low risk settings when community transmission rates are low but should be based on documented risk assessment.

Scheduled admissions tested within the three days before admission should be re-tested as soon as practical after admission if admitted to a critical care area. This is not required as a routine in those who are fully vaccinated and those who have had laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 in the previous 9 months. Otherwise re-testing should be as outlined above.

Surveillance testing of all asymptomatic children requiring scheduled or unscheduled admission is not required. Testing of asymptomatic children may be appropriate if they require or are likely to require admission to intensive care units, high dependency units or haematology oncology wards or if they are scheduled for particularly lengthy or complex surgical procedures. This is likely to become less useful for older children when they are fully vaccinated. Surveillance testing of an asymptomatic accompanying parent/guardian/carer is not required in general and particularly so when they are fully vaccinated. Note that symptomatic parents/guardian/carer and those who have been advised by public health to restrict their movements because they are COVID-19 Contacts should not attend the hospital regardless of test results unless there are extraordinary circumstances that require an exception on compassionate grounds.

See also the HSE document "[Service Continuity in a COVID-19 Environment; a Strategic Framework for Delivery](https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/covid19-updates.html)". <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/covid19-updates.html>

Note: Nasopharyngeal sampling can be very uncomfortable for many patients and frequent sampling by this method is likely to be unacceptable to some patients. While nasopharyngeal samples are preferred for diagnostic testing a deep nasal /mid turbinate sample should generally be used for contact and surveillance testing as frequent sampling by this method is more likely to be acceptable.

Note: Contact and droplet precautions should NOT be withdrawn solely on the basis of a test

reported as SARS-CoV-2 “not -detected”, as this result is not sufficient to exclude infection. The continuing requirement for contact and droplet precautions should be reviewed, with appropriate IPC advice. In the context of clinical evidence of severe respiratory disease in the absence of an established alternative diagnosis, contact and droplet precautions should generally be continued.

Interpretation of results

Interpretation of a positive result from surveillance testing for COVID-19 can be challenging, as the test is applied in the absence of relevant clinical features. It is apparent that SARS- CoV-2 RNA can remain detectable in the nasopharynx of people infected with COVID-19 for months after recovery and that detection of viral RNA is not a reliable indicator of infectivity. In general terms, low Ct values are more likely to reflect current infection. High Ct values are more likely to reflect resolved infection.

Acute hospital laboratories performing surveillance testing should consider defining what constitutes a high Ct value for the platform or platforms they are using, with reference to the range of values they have observed on patients with a clinical history consistent with recent infection and values observed on any patients who have had repeated positive tests over a period of time. Ct values of 30 or greater are generally considered high but this is very dependent on the platform used and some systems may not generate Ct values.

Where the medical staff of the laboratory have access to relevant clinical details and previous laboratory test results it may be apparent that the high Ct value result is readily explained as residual RNA from a previously confirmed infection and that no further action is required.

Where clinical details and previous laboratory results are not immediately available laboratories that are able to define a high Ct value for the platform or platforms in use should consider the following approach to reporting:

1. repeat test the sample on the same or a different platform to assess reproducibility before reporting;
2. if the result is not reproducible report as not-detected or not-confirmed and request a repeat sample if appropriate;
3. if the result is reproducible but with a high Ct value **OR** if only one of two targets is detected report as weak positive or equivocal and request repeat sample if appropriate;
4. Include an interpretative comment on confirmed weak positive results to the effect that “*A weak positive result was detected. Correlation with the clinical history is recommended. This result may reflect resolved/resolving infection, as weak positive results may persist for some weeks. In the absence of a clinical history of illness, the result may reflect any stage of*

infection from early pre-symptomatic infection through to resolving/resolved infection. The possibility that this is a false positive result should also be considered”;

5. Detailed guidance on the interpretation of high Ct values is available at: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/outbreakmanagementguidance/PCR%20weak%20results%20guidance.pdf>

COVID-19 and Pregnancy

Recent evidence suggests that some pregnant women may be somewhat more likely to develop severe disease compared with non-pregnant women and that COVID-19 may be associated with placentitis and a risk of still birth.

COVID-19 and Immunity after Recovery

There is still limited experience with immunity after recovery and therefore caution is required in interpretation. In general, patients who have recovered from COVID-19 have evidence of an immune response and they appear unlikely to acquire infection that makes them infectious for others, at least in the short-term (up to nine months following recovery). However, it is recommended that healthcare workers who have recovered from COVID-19 continue to follow the same IPC precautions as all other HCWs when in contact with patients to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

Currently, antibody testing is not recommended for routine use to assess immunity to infection, as there is no consensus on how to interpret the results.

Survival in the Environment

Survival of SARS-CoV-2 on environmental surfaces is dependent on the surface type and the environmental conditions. One experimental study using a SARS-CoV-2 strain reported viability on plastic for up to 72 hours, for 48 hours on stainless steel and up to eight hours on copper. However, the levels of virus declined very quickly over the time period.

Staff

This section focuses on staffing and how to limit staff exposure. It provides advice on staff movement across facilities and provides guidance on those external contractors who may be present in the acute setting.

Limiting Exposure of Staff to COVID-19

1. Minimise the number of HCWs caring for patients with possible or confirmed COVID-19.
2. Note that the risk of severe COVID-19 disease is far less in staff who are fully vaccinated. A person is considered fully vaccinated as follows:
 - a. 15 days after the second dose of AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria);
 - b. 7 days after the second Pfizer-BioNTech dose (Comirnaty);
 - c. 14 days after the second Moderna dose (Spikevax);
 - d. 14 days after Janssen (one dose vaccination course);

If other vaccines become available the requirement for vaccination will be as advised by HSE.ie.

3. Ensure there are adequate numbers of HCWs to allow them time to adhere to the necessary IPC precautions, in particular to adhere to hand hygiene and safe donning and doffing of PPE;
4. In general, one-to-one care is not essential for a single patient with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 in a non-critical care setting, provided there is adequate staffing to allow staff to safely apply contact and droplet precautions, with addition of airborne precautions when aerosol-generating procedures (AGP) are performed;
5. However, recent experience suggests that transmission in hospital has been associated with placement of individual infectious patients in general wards outside of COVID-19 cohort areas. Therefore, it is important to avoid placing infectious patients outside of COVID-19 cohort area unless it is considered essential to their clinical care. When this cannot be avoided the inherent risk must be recognised and a specific plan to manage that risk is required; see section on 'cohorting and streaming' below;
6. Where practical, for the duration of each shift, assign designated HCW(s) to care for patients with confirmed COVID-19 who may be accommodated in isolation room(s)/cohort bay(s)/areas of a ward. Designating HCW will minimise the likelihood of a HCW caring for patients with COVID-19 and without COVID-19 during the same shift. This is likely to be lower risk when staff are fully vaccinated;
7. Where possible, designated extra catering support should be provided to HCWs in COVID-19 cohort areas, to minimise their need to travel to communal eating facilities; however the risk of staff moving from a clinical area to a rest or dining area is lower when staff are fully vaccinated;
8. In order to ensure appropriate care for the patient with COVID-19 with the minimum of risk, HCWs who enter the patient's room or cohort area should plan to deliver as much of the care required as possible at each entry. This is likely to be less important for staff who are fully vaccinated;
9. Social interaction between staff should be limited; in particular interaction between HCWs who do not have to work with each other should be avoided, as it introduces an additional avoidable risk. This is likely to be less important for staff who are fully vaccinated;

10. Where face to face discussion facilitates decision making for patient care the risk of a small number of staff meeting for essential clinical purposes (for example hand-over or a multi-disciplinary meeting) is low if all those present are fully vaccinated and good IPC practice is observed. The meeting space selected should facilitate the anticipated number of attendees, so that physical distancing and adequate ventilation can be observed;
11. Rooms used for staff breaks or meetings should be assessed for maximum occupancy bearing in mind requirements for physical distancing and consideration as to how ventilation can be improved. The maximum occupancy should be displayed on the door, so that all are made aware of when that capacity is reached or exceeded;
12. The maximum number must not be exceeded, even if all present are fully vaccinated and/or wearing masks. Surfaces in break, rest or meeting rooms should be kept free of clutter to facilitate regular cleaning;
13. At the start of each shift, all staff should be asked to confirm that they do not currently have symptoms of viral respiratory infection, such as fever, cough, shortness-of-breath, recent loss of taste or smell or myalgia. In the event new symptoms develop during a shift, the HCW should report immediately to the person-in-charge. This applies to vaccinated staff and unvaccinated staff. Recording of staff temperatures upon presenting for work may also be considered as an additional measure to detect possible infection in some settings. Recording of temperatures cannot be considered as an alternative to checking for symptoms as many symptomatic people do not have a fever.

Guidance in relation to occupational health issues for HCW is available on www.hpsc.ie

Staff movement across facilities

1. The movement of staff between facilities should be minimised. It is recognised that some staff have to work across multiple sites to ensure service provision;
2. The risk of staff movement between facilities is expected to be lower if those staff who have to move across sites are fully vaccinated ;
3. All staff should ensure that they only attend work if they are symptom-free and are not required to absent themselves for other reasons (for example advised to do so following identification as a COVID-19 contact). **This continues to apply to staff who are fully vaccinated;**
4. All staff should adhere to standard precautions, including hand hygiene, physical distancing, and all current guidance on IPC practice;
5. HCWs and other essential service providers who are required to attend at healthcare facilities to provide essential services or assessments, for example public health nurse assessments, assessments for outpatient parenteral antimicrobial therapy (OPAT), staff involved in discharge planning to LTRCFs or legal representatives should not be regarded as

visitors in the general sense and should be facilitated. See guidance for visitors, referred to previously.

Staff Uniforms/Clothing

See Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for the Health Service Executive 2020. Staff should avoid bringing personal items, including mobile phones into cohort/isolation areas.

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/Acute%20Hospital%20Checklist%20for%20COVID-19%20Control%20Measures.pdf>

External Contractors & Product Representatives

1. Guidance on visitation to acute healthcare settings should apply to attendance by pharmaceutical and product representatives to clinical areas. These are not essential or important service providers and as such, should not be present in patient care areas while an area is under Framework Level 3, 4 or 5 restrictions;
2. At Levels 1 and 2, attendance in patient care areas should be by prior invitation from a senior staff member and in line with any local institutional policy for attendance of company representatives;
3. Product or technical representatives who attend to support the delivery of essential healthcare to a patient or group of patients may be viewed as essential service providers and as such could be facilitated to attend as needed, to deliver that healthcare (for example technical experts required for fitting of prostheses);
4. All hospitals should have pathways in place to ensure that services provided by external contractors, including deliveries of supplies can be provided in a safe manner, with minimal risk to the contractors, staff and patients. This requires, amongst other things, that contractors ensure that their staff who may enter clinical areas are fully vaccinated or if not fully vaccinated that they are subject to a risk-assessment process equivalent to that which the HSE- applies to HSE staff;
5. All pharmaceutical and product representatives and staff of external contractors attending clinical areas should be fully vaccinated
6. The hospital should have processes in place to manage the risk that symptomatic external contractors and those delivering goods with COVID-19 could enter the facility;
7. All external contractors and delivery persons should be required to perform hand hygiene on entering and leaving the facility;

8. Appropriate instruction in IPC practice and access to alcohol-based hand rub and PPE should be provided to external contractors where it is necessary to facilitate the service provision. However, a requirement for external contractors or delivery persons to wear additional PPE should be very exceptional. They should not normally be working within two metres of a patient with COVID-19. Note the NPHE recommendation regarding use of masks in settings where a distance of 2m cannot be maintained and encounters between staff/contractors are expected to last for longer than 15 minutes.

Standard Precautions

Hand hygiene

See Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for the Health Service Executive 2020.
<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/acute%20Hospital%20Checklist%20for%20COVID-19%20Control%20Measures.pdf>

Alcohol-based hand rub

See Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for the Health Service Executive 2020.
<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/acute%20Hospital%20Checklist%20for%20COVID-19%20Control%20Measures.pdf>

Respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette

See Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for the Health Service Executive 2020.
<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/acute%20Hospital%20Checklist%20for%20COVID-19%20Control%20Measures.pdf>

Safe management of linen (Laundry)

See Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for the Health Service Executive 2020.
<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/acute%20Hospital%20Checklist%20for%20COVID-19%20Control%20Measures.pdf>

Management of blood and body fluid spills

See Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for the Health Service Executive 2020.

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/Acute%20Hospital%20Checklist%20for%20COVID-19%20Control%20Measures.pdf>

Management of waste

See Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for the Health Service Executive 2020 and ([Appendix 2](#))

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/Acute%20Hospital%20Checklist%20for%20COVID-19%20Control%20Measures.pdf>

Transmission-based precautions for COVID-19

See Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for the Health Service Executive 2020.

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/Acute%20Hospital%20Checklist%20for%20COVID-19%20Control%20Measures.pdf>

Care for Patients in the Acute Setting

Cohorting and Streaming

At entry to the hospital, patients presenting for assessment should be segregated into ‘possible COVID’ and ‘COVID not suspected’ parallel streams. This should take account of criteria set out in the latest version of the [COVID-19 Hospital pathway](#). The use of clinical judgement is also critical, as some patients may present with atypical features.

Patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should be cared for by staff that are fully vaccinated if at all possible and should be isolated in single rooms with *en suite* facilities. However, where single room capacity is exceeded, it is necessary to cohort patients. It is generally not practical or necessary to institute transmission - based precautions on all those patients where there is no clinical suspicion of COVID-19 while awaiting surveillance testing results. This is particularly the case if the hospital continues to perform surveillance testing on patients who are fully vaccinated. It is appropriate to institute transmission based precautions pending surveillance test results on patients on high flow oxygen devices or similar respiratory support particularly if not fully vaccinated. All patients should be encouraged to wear a mask while waiting for the result, if tolerated. There should be local systems in place to ensure a positive test result is promptly recognised and communicated to staff and that transmission-based precautions are immediately implemented for any patient whose test result is reported as SARS-CoV-2 detected.

Consideration should be given to additional protective measures for patients who are identified as not fully vaccinated at the time of admission. This may include provision of single room accommodation where this is practical to achieve, specific advice and support to minimise interaction with other patients in inpatient areas and offering vaccination to anyone who is eligible for vaccination as soon as they are clinically fit for vaccination.

Patients with confirmed COVID-19 can generally be cohorted together however patients with known or suspected variants of concern that are the subject of enhanced public health measures should not be cohorted with other patients.

AGPs on patients with confirmed COVID-19 should only be performed in multi-occupancy cohort areas if there is no practical alternative. If this is unavoidable, every practical effort must be made to minimise the number of staff present in the area during the procedure and to maximise ventilation of the space. All staff present in the area should be fully vaccinated and must wear appropriate PPE.

Patients with suspected COVID-19 should not be cohorted with those who are confirmed positive.

Cohorting of suspected COVID-19 cases should be avoided if at all possible. The risk of cohorting **suspected cases** in multi-occupancy areas is much greater than that of cohorting confirmed positive patients together, as the suspect cohort is likely to include patients with and without COVID-19. This is most likely to occur in the assessment stage, where laboratory confirmation of COVID-19 is pending.

When **suspected cases of COVID-19 are cohorted in multi-occupancy areas:**

1. An AGP should not be undertaken in a multi-occupancy area accommodating patients with suspected COVID-19, as there is an increased risk of cross-transmission to other patients;
2. Patients with suspected COVID-19 requiring an AGP should be prioritised for negative pressure or single isolation rooms particularly if a variant of concern that is the subject of enhanced public health measures is known or suspected;
3. Every effort should be made to minimise cross-transmission risk;
4. Maintain as much physical distance as possible between beds. If required, reduce the number of patients/beds in the area to facilitate adequate physical distancing;
5. The patient should wear a surgical face mask where tolerated, particularly if they are away from their bed space and whenever physical distance cannot be maintained;
6. Patients should remain in these multi-occupancy areas for as short a period of time as is possible;
7. Use privacy curtains between the beds to minimise opportunities for close contact;

8. There should be clear signage indicating an area is a designated cohort area to alert staff. Cohort areas may include an area within a ward or extend to an entire ward. Cohort areas may have multi-occupancy rooms or a series of single rooms;
9. A designated cohort area should be separated from non-cohort areas by closed doors;
10. Minimise movement of staff in cohort areas and ensure that the number of staff entering the cohort area is kept to a minimum, for example during clinical ward rounds. Maintain a record (for example a sign in sheet) for all staff entering the cohort area;
11. Staff assigned to work in a cohort area should be fully vaccinated. This reduces the risk of infection in staff and reduces risks associated with staff movement during a shift if this becomes unavoidable;
12. Movement of staff and activities in cohort areas should ideally be linear (from clean to dirty zone), allowing staff to enter and exit the designated contaminated area through separate entrances. However, it is recognised that this may not always be feasible;
13. The area should not be used as a thoroughfare by other patients, visitors or staff, including patients being transferred, staff going for meal breaks, and staff and visitors entering and exiting the building.

Patient placement, surveillance & assessment for infection risk

1. All patients must be promptly assessed for COVID-19 risk on arrival at a healthcare setting. Patients with COVID-19 may not have respiratory symptoms on presentation. In all healthcare settings, patients with symptoms of COVID-19 should be separated from patients without symptoms of COVID-19, as soon as possible;
2. **Determine if patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 appear likely to have acquired infection outside of Ireland or as a result of contact with someone who appears to have acquired infection outside of Ireland.** If single rooms are limited, such patients require higher priority for single room isolation and transmission-based precautions should be strictly adhered to given the potential for introduction of new variants of COVID-19 and their amplification in the acute hospital setting;
3. **Staff should be aware that the protection afforded by vaccination may be less when caring for people with infection with certain variants;**
4. Patients who are identified as COVID-19 contacts should also be separated from the general patient population as soon as possible. Contacts who are fully vaccinated are generally lower priority for separation from the general patient population where facilities are limited. People who are contacts should not be cohorted in an area with patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19;
5. In the event that a patient presents with suspected COVID-19, but SARS-CoV-2 RNA is not detected from a properly-obtained specimen tested by a validated and sensitive method, contact and droplet precautions should continue until such time as:

- (a) a plausible alternative pathogen or diagnosis that explains the presenting complaint is identified and any other pathogen identified does not require contact and droplet precautions;
 - (b) further investigation, such as obtaining a repeat specimen for testing and appropriate imaging make a diagnosis of COVID-19 very unlikely and;
 - (c) A senior clinical decision maker with experience in managing patients with COVID-19 has determined that contact and droplet precautions are no longer required.
6. Patients should be continuously reviewed throughout their inpatient stay for the development of symptoms that suggest COVID-19;
 7. HCWs should not discount the possibility that new symptoms suggest COVID-19, on the basis of a recent test result reported as SARS-CoV-2 not-detected /negative because a patient could still be in the incubation period at the time of testing or could acquire infection after admission (HA-COVID-19).
 8. HCWs should not discount the possibility that symptoms represent SARS-CoV-2 infection on the basis that a patient is fully vaccinated.

COVID-19 Positive Patient Placement for Inpatient Care

1. Patients with COVID-19 should be accommodated in the same clinical area wherever possible, for example by identifying COVID-19 wards /units;
2. Patients with infectious COVID-19 should be cared for by fully vaccinated staff.
3. Signage must be placed at the entrance to the designated COVID-19 ward/unit and at the entrance to the patient's isolation room or the designated cohort area, to restrict entry and indicate the level of transmission-based precautions required, namely contact and droplet precautions;
4. Patients should be cared for in a single room with *en suite* facilities. If there is no *en suite* toilet, a designated commode should be used, with arrangements in place for safe removal of a bedpan/urinal to an appropriate disposal point. Alternatively, arrange for safe access to a toilet close by that is assigned for the use of that patient only. Patients with COVID-19 may also be considered for accommodation in a designated COVID-19 cohort area, with a toilet allocated for the use of those patients only;
5. In the event of a commode being used, the HCW should leave the single room wearing appropriate PPE, transport the commode directly to the nearest sluice and remove PPE in the sluice after placing the contents directly into the bed pan washer or pulp disposal unit;
6. A second HCW should be available to assist with opening and closing doors to the single room and sluice room;
7. Avoid storing any unnecessary equipment or supplies in the patient's room or cohort area;
8. Take time to explain to the patient the importance of the precautions that are in place to

manage their care and advise them against leaving the room without HCW guidance. Listen and respond to any concerns they may have, to ensure support and optimal adherence is achieved during their care;

9. The allocation of patients for available single rooms should be decided locally, based on safety, need, capacity for cohorting of patients with confirmed COVID-19 infection, ward infrastructure and available resources.

Managing a cluster or outbreak of COVID-19 in an Acute Hospital Setting

Each IPCT should have a robust system in place for early detection of inpatients with COVID-19 diagnosed after admission, as this may indicate hospital-acquisition and transmission.

A self-assessment checklist for **IPC measures to manage the risk of spread of COVID-19 in the acute hospital setting** can be found at here: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/Acute%20Hospital%20Checklist%20for%20COVID-19%20Control%20Measures.pdf>

1. It is important that the IPCT and Occupational Health Department are in close contact to rapidly detect if there are HCWs with confirmed COVID-19 who have any epidemiological links to wards with suspected cross-transmission;
2. If the test results indicate there are COVID-19 acquisitions associated with a ward or unit, an outbreak should be declared and an outbreak control team convened;
3. An outbreak of COVID-19 must be notified to the Department of Public Health in addition to the standing obligation for dual notification of all cases of COVID-19 (laboratory and clinical);
4. All of the usual outbreak control measures apply;
5. An outbreak management checklist is available on the HPSC website <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/Checklist%20to%20support%20COVID19%20outbreak%20management%20in%20Oacute%20healthcare%20setting.pdf>
6. Contacts of patients with confirmed COVID-19 should be cohorted together and monitored for new symptoms, with clinical care to include contact and droplet precautions;
7. Avoid cohorting confirmed COVID-19 patients with patients who are not confirmed to have COVID-19;
8. Wherever feasible, try to avoid moving inpatients between wards where transmission of COVID-19 is suspected, unless patient movement is required to support clinical care;
9. Closing an outbreak; an outbreak can be closed following consultation with the Department of Public Health once 28 days have elapsed (that is two incubation periods after the onset of symptoms in the last case);

10. A self-assessment checklist for IPC measures to manage risk of spread of COVID19 in acute hospital settings is available on the HPSC website <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/Acute%20Hospital%20Checklist%20for%20COVID-19%20Control%20Measures.pdf>

Guidance in relation to occupational health issues for HCW is available: www.hpsc.ie

Guidance in relation to identification of contacts is available: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/contacttracingguidance/>

Guidance in relation to outbreak management is available: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/outbreakmanagementguidance/>

A suspected case of hospital-acquired COVID-19 in an inpatient

The European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) has published surveillance definitions for COVID-19 including definitions for determination of source of infection.

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/surveillance/surveillance-definitions>

“The case source definitions are as follows (accessed on May 29th):

Community-associated COVID-19 (CA-COVID-19):

1. *Symptoms present on admission or with onset on day 1 or 2 after admission.*
2. *Symptom onset on days 3-7 and a strong suspicion of community transmission.*

Indeterminate association (IA-COVID-19):

1. *Symptom onset on day 3-7 after admission, with insufficient information on the source of infection to assign to another category.*

Probable healthcare-associated COVID-19 (HA-COVID-19):

1. *Symptoms onset on day 8-14 after admission*
2. *Symptom onset on day 3-7 and a strong suspicion of healthcare transmission.*

Definite HA-COVID-19:

1. *Symptom onset on day ≥ 14 after admission”*

Please note that for cases of COVID-19 with symptom onset within 14 days of discharge, case-by-case determination is advised. The definitions above do not apply to HCW for whom case-by-case determination is advised.

For purposes of reporting data to the HSE's Acute Operations Business Intelligence Unit (BIU), the categories of probable and definite are combined. The above definitions are based on date of symptom onset however a significant proportion of cases of COVID-19 that are detected after admission to the acute hospital setting are detected in advance of symptom onset by testing. For the purposes of returns to the BIU the date of first positive sample should be considered as corresponding to symptom onset recognising that some such patients will develop symptoms subsequent to the date of first positive test and that some patients will not develop symptoms at any time.

1. The usual principles of detection and management of a cluster or outbreak of a transmissible pathogen in acute healthcare settings apply to COVID-19, including the legal obligation to notify the Department of Public Health.
2. The number of hospital-acquired cases of COVID-19 (HA-COVID-19) in acute public hospitals must be reported weekly to the BIU of HSE Acute Hospital Operations. HA-COVID-19 must be recorded as an incident on the National Incident Management System and an incident analysis should normally be performed although in the event of an outbreak it may be more practical to treat the outbreak as a single incident for recording and analysis.
3. A local surveillance system should be implemented in each ward/clinical area, whereby early detection of an admitted patient with new symptoms which may be consistent with COVID-19 is part of the routine daily assessment and handovers.
4. IPC teams should ask about patients or HCW with new symptoms or signs of COVID-19 on their regular visits to wards.
5. Detection of COVID-19 in a HCW requires an assessment as to whether they form part of a hospital-associated chain of transmission, involving patients and HCWs or primarily involving HCWs.
6. Where an inpatient develops new symptoms consistent with COVID-19, apply the recommended IPC precautions for a patient with suspected COVID-19, a nasopharyngeal swab should be taken and a test ordered for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19).
7. Inform the IPCT that an inpatient is being investigated for COVID-19.
8. If the patient is already in a single room, apply all the additional elements of transmission-based precautions required for a patient with suspected COVID-19.
9. If the patient is accommodated in a multi-occupancy room/bay with other patients at the time that new symptoms develop, all patients in the room should be clinically evaluated, their vaccination status should be determined and they should be subject to ongoing close

monitoring for new symptoms consistent with COVID-19. If any additional patients have or develop new symptoms, they should also be tested for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19).

10. The multi-occupancy room or bay should be closed to new admissions pending receipt of the test result(s).
11. A risk assessment must be undertaken, with regard to decisions to move patients who are awaiting a test result. This needs to take into account duration of the contact of the patients in the multi-occupancy room prior to symptom onset, the dependency and case mix of the patients currently in the room, whether there is availability of single room(s) for patient(s) with symptoms awaiting test results on that ward, the anticipated turnaround time for receipt of a laboratory test result and the availability of staffing on the ward for day and night shifts. It may be prudent to avoid moving patients to another ward, unless clinical need dictates transfer to another department for escalation of care.
12. If a patient who is a contact is fit for discharge, they may be discharged, with advice for the patient to self-monitor for 14 days and contact their GP via telephone for advice in the event new symptoms develop. Information for self-isolation is available on the HPSC at this link <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/educationguidance/Isolation%20quick%20guide%20Adults%20and%20children%20from%20their%2013th%20birthday.pdf>
13. If it is deemed appropriate for all of the patients to remain in the affected multi- occupancy room/bay pending receipt of laboratory test result(s), the recommended IPC precautions for a patient with suspected COVID-19 should be applied to all patients in the bay, with nursing staff designated for the care of those patients for the duration of the shift.
14. The test results should be reviewed as soon as available to inform next steps.
15. If an inpatient is confirmed to have COVID-19, clinical care should be continued following the recommended IPC precautions for patients with confirmed COVID-19 and they should be moved to a single room, if not already accommodated in a single room OR if there are two or more patients with COVID-19 on the ward, they may be cohorted together.

A confirmed case of hospital-acquired COVID-19 on a ward

Close the ward to new admissions. If this is not considered possible or if at any point during the outbreak this is reconsidered because of other clinical risks a documented risk assessment should be performed. A risk assessment process is outlined at the following: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/Acute%20Hospital%20Checklist%20for%20COVID-19%20Control%20Measures.pdf>

1. Transfer out only based on clinical need or to designated cohort area of hospital
2. All contacts and their vaccination status to be identified

3. Any patient and HCW contacts within 48 hours prior to symptom onset in the HA case or test date if case is asymptomatic to be identified
4. Patients identified as contacts should be tested on day 0 and again on or about days 3, 7 and 14 unless they are fully vaccinated or have had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months.
5. More frequent testing (for example every 2 to 3 days) may be considered particularly for non-vaccinated patients in multi-bed rooms.
6. Current NPHET advice is that any HCW identified as a close contact should be tested for SARS-CoV-2 at day 0 and at day 10. If the test at 10 day returns a result of 'SARS-CoV-2' not detected' the HCW can stop their restricted movements and return to work. This applies unless they are fully vaccinated or have had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months. Testing of asymptomatic HCWs contacts who are fully vaccinated in a particular context should be supported by a risk assessment
7. All remaining patients on the ward (i.e. even those who are not contacts) to be tested at day 0 unless they are fully vaccinated or have had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months. Additional testing should be considered on day 3 and further testing may also be appropriate.
8. Testing of other asymptomatic HCWs who normally work on the ward is generally not necessary if they are fully vaccinated or have had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months. However testing of asymptomatic HCWs who normally work on the ward should be performed if there is a specific indication to do so for example if the case acquired on the ward is known or suspected to be associated with a variant against which vaccines may be less effective, if there is extensive or persistent transmission on the ward or if cases of symptomatic infection of healthcare workers associated with the incident are observed.
9. The details of any discharged contacts that require follow up should be provided to Public Health for recommended follow-up testing for contacts in the community.
10. Samples from apparently isolated cases of hospital acquired COVID-19 and the sample from the index case of any outbreak should be sequenced or submitted for sequencing if at all possible. Consider storing samples from all hospital acquired cases if sequencing is not immediately possible.

Specific settings

The following guidance is given to assist specific care settings to implement the principles of standard precautions and transmission-based precautions described in this document, which apply in all care settings. This section will be updated as further information becomes available.

Critical Care Setting

1. If admitted to a critical care unit, the patient should be cared for in a negative pressure isolation room where available, or if not available, a single room. If the patient requires ventilation a closed ventilator circuit should be used.
2. The door to the room must remain securely closed, except when entering or leaving.
3. All respiratory equipment must be protected by a filter with high efficiency (e.g., BS EN ISO 23328-1:2008).
4. Disposable respiratory equipment should be used wherever possible. Reusable equipment must be decontaminated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
5. Ventilator circuits should not be broken, unless absolutely necessary.
6. Ventilators must be placed on stand-by when carrying out bagging.
7. Water humidification should be avoided and a heat and moisture exchange should be used if possible.
8. Use only closed system suction.

Operating theatres

1. The decision that surgery is essential during the weeks after diagnosis of COVID-19 should be made by senior surgeons and anaesthetists and should take account of the risks to the patient of increased mortality associated with surgical procedures following a recent diagnosis of COVID-19.
2. Retesting for SARS-CoV-2 RNA in advance of scheduling surgery is generally not required in patients with recently confirmed COVID-19.
3. Ventilation in both laminar flow and conventionally-ventilated theatres should remain fully on during surgical procedures where patients have suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection.
4. Aerosols which may be generated as a result of AGPs will be rapidly diluted by operating theatre ventilation.
5. Air passing from operating theatres to adjacent areas will be highly diluted and is not considered to be a significant risk.
6. Local risk assessment may dictate that a neutral pressure theatre or negative pressure theatre is preferred for COVID-19 procedures. The patient should be transported directly into the operating theatre and should wear a surgical mask if it can be tolerated.
7. The operating theatre staff must be informed in advance of a patient transfer of a confirmed or possible COVID-19 case.
8. The patient should be reviewed, anaesthetised, intubated, extubated and recovered in the

operating theatre.

9. All staff present in the theatre should be fully vaccinated. Appropriate IPC precautions including hand hygiene and use of appropriate PPE should be followed by staff present in the theatre when AGPs are performed (for example intubation, extubation). If the operative procedure is anticipated to involve an AGP, as described in the section on AGP, all staff present in the theatre for the duration of the surgery must wear appropriate PPE for an AGP scenario.
10. Entry and exit from the room should be minimised during the procedure.
11. Disposable anaesthetic equipment should be used where possible.
12. The anaesthetic machine must be protected by a filter with viral efficiency to 99.99%.
13. The operating theatre should be cleaned, as per local policy, paying particular attention to hand contact points (for example on the anaesthetic machine).
14. Instruments and devices should be decontaminated in the normal manner, in accordance with manufacturer's advice.

Outpatient Department (OPD) or Day Service

Refer to the HSE Acute Operations Guidance on Scheduled Care for further information.

Radiology

1. Refer to the section on mobile medical equipment for guidance on mobile X-ray devices.
2. Refer to the section on PPE for guidance on requirements when undertaking procedures for those with known or confirmed COVID-19 infection.
3. All patients should be asked to wear a surgical face mask while waiting for and during their procedure, where tolerated.
4. Appointments should be scheduled so that patients are not kept waiting in communal areas.
5. If a patient with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection attends the radiology department, all surfaces and equipment that the patient has been in direct contact with should be cleaned and disinfected after the patient has left, as per standard protocol.
6. The room can be cleaned once the patient has left and used once surfaces are dry, unless an AGP was performed.
7. Pay special attention to thorough cleaning of frequently-touched sites, such as the trolley, chair handles and horizontal surfaces.
8. For CT scanning –once the patient has left the room, the area can be immediately cleaned and disinfected as per standard protocols.

Dialysis

General preparedness

1. The vaccination status of all dialysis patients should be documented
2. Vaccination of all staff working dialysis units will reduce risk for dialysis patients
3. All dialysis patients should be provided with information on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 infection and general measures, including; respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, hand hygiene and physical distancing available on www.hse.ie;
4. Review patient pathways to the dialysis unit.
5. Ensure that arrangements are in place for individuals who do not have access to private transport to attend for their dialysis if they have symptoms of viral respiratory infection.
6. If a symptomatic individual attends the unit, IPC measures should immediately be applied. Arrangements should be in place for a nasopharyngeal swab sample to be collected and tested for SARS-CoV-2 as swiftly as possible.
7. Review patient pathways within the dialysis unit.
8. Ensure a designated isolation area has been identified for dialysis.
9. Ensure that processes are in place for rapid triage and isolation of patients with symptoms of suspected COVID-19 or another respiratory viral infection.
10. Minimise patient-to-patient contact. For example, stagger arrival times, extend waiting areas or bring patients directly to their dialysis station.
11. Provide access to alcohol-based hand rub and tissues.
12. Provide surgical face masks to patients, so that they can be used when they attend the unit. A mask need not be worn when they are in their assigned space for dialysis although some units may request this based local risk assessment.
13. If patients are requested to wear a mask in their bed space this should not be a barrier to providing patients with refreshment or meals while attending for dialysis.

Before arrival to the Dialysis Unit

1. Dialysis patients should be instructed to contact the dialysis unit if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or fever, in advance of attending for dialysis. This continues to apply to patients who are fully vaccinated;
2. Dialysis patients who have been in close contact with someone who has suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection should be instructed to advise the dialysis unit in advance of attending. This continues to apply to patients who are fully vaccinated;
3. Patients should be advised to check their temperature before getting dialysis transport.

Transport

Asymptomatic patients can travel by their usual means.

Asymptomatic patients who have been informed that they are close contacts of person with COVID-19 infection will be following public health advice for restricted movement:

1. They may drive themselves to the unit or be driven by someone who is willing to drive them (Units should have arrangements in place in the event this is not possible);
2. They should not use public transport or travel with another patient from the unit;
3. The patient should be advised to:
 - a. Wash hands with soap and water before leaving their house or use hand sanitiser.
 - b. In so far as is possible; maintain two metre distance from other individuals (for example sit in the backseat passenger side away from the driver).
 - c. Wear a surgical face mask.

Note that additional IPC precautions are generally not required for close contacts who are fully vaccinated however an additional measure of caution may be appropriate in the context of dialysis given that response to vaccine may be suboptimal in many dialysis patients.

Individuals who have symptoms of COVID-19 or confirmed infection should telephone in advance of their appointment and if necessary, may drive themselves to the unit if they feel well enough or be driven in private transport by someone who has already had exposure and is willing to drive them. If they have a surgical face mask, this should be worn for transfer to hospital. If they do not have a surgical face mask they should use a cloth face covering. Where they cannot arrange for their own transport, the unit should have alternative arrangements in place.

Patient Placement

Asymptomatic individuals - should proceed with dialysis as per usual.

Asymptomatic individuals who are a close contact of someone who has confirmed COVID-19 should be placed in a single room if available or if not, then in a dialysis station with at least two metres physical separation from other patients.

Individuals who have travelled from outside of Ireland in the previous 14 days should be placed in a single room if available or if not, then in a dialysis station with at least two metres physical separation from other patients. Testing in advance of attendance for dialysis should be considered where possible to do so.

Symptomatic individuals – with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection should be placed in a single room with the door to remain closed, where possible. Negative pressure isolation is not necessary, unless AGPs are to be performed (see list of AGP above). Appropriate isolation signage

should be placed on the door. Contact and droplet precautions should be added.

In the event that the need arises, consideration can be given to cohorting patients with confirmed COVID-19 infection who require dialysis.

Satellite Dialysis Units

1. If a dialysis patient has clinical features of COVID-19 and is still at home, the patient should be instructed to stay at home, and the parent renal unit should be informed, so appropriate arrangements can be made.
2. If a dialysis patient has clinical features for COVID-19 and presents to a satellite dialysis unit, the patient should be placed in a single room and the parent renal unit contacted. If there is no isolation facility, the patient should be given a surgical face mask, access to alcohol-based hand rub and tissues and placed in an area at least 2m away from other individuals. If they are not in any distress, it may be practical for them to wait in a car if they drove themselves to the unit.

Dialysis Machine

The dialysis machine cleaning/disinfection protocol should be adhered to, as per standard practices.

Maternity Units

The following section addresses specific infection prevention and control issues, which may arise in the care of a mother with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection in the maternity setting.

This section should be read in conjunction with guidance from the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, RCPI available [here](#)

Issues related to visiting and persons accompanying women in labour are addressed in the guidance document on visiting in acute hospitals: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/visitorsvisiting/>

Delivery

1. Mothers should not be asked to wear a surgical face mask during labour and childbirth. However, they should be requested to wear a surgical face mask when outside of the isolation room.
2. Appropriate PPE must be worn by any person entering the room.

3. The use of birthing pools should be avoided for suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection.
4. The use of Entonox or maternal pushing during labour are not AGPs associated with an increased risk of infection.

Postpartum

If the mother is well enough to care for the baby herself, both mother and baby should be isolated in a single room with en-suite facilities for the duration of hospitalisation. The following additional precautions are advised:

1. The baby should be placed in an enclosed incubator in the room.
2. Where an enclosed incubator is not available, the cot should be placed at least 2m distance from the mother.
3. When baby is outside the incubator and mother is breast feeding, bathing, caring for, cuddling, or is within 2m of the baby the mother should be advised to wear a surgical face mask, and to clean her hands thoroughly with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water before and after interacting with the baby and to increase ventilation in so far as practical consistent with weather and comfort.
4. The mother should be encouraged and taught to practice respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.
5. The baby should be temporarily removed from the room if any AGPs are to be performed within the room.
6. Routine testing of babies born to mothers with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection is not appropriate. However, they should be closely monitored for signs of infection.
7. Parents should be provided with information about signs of possible COVID-19 infection in their baby and aware of who to contact if they are concerned post discharge.

Breastfeeding

To date, no evidence has been found to suggest that the virus is transmitted in breast milk. The following precautions are advised:

1. If a mother with COVID-19 is breastfeeding, she should be advised to wear a surgical face mask and to wash her hands or use alcohol-based hand rub before and after interacting with her baby.
2. If the mother is expressing breast milk using a pump, this should be designated to the mother for the duration of hospitalisation and should be cleaned and disinfected, as per the manufacturer's instructions.

3. The expressed breast milk (EBM) container should be transported from the mother's room to the storage location in a plastic-specimen transport bag. Storage conditions should be as per local policy. However, the EBM should be clearly marked and stored in a patient-specific container box separately to the EBM of other patients.

The neonate born to a mother with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection

Suctioning, bag mask ventilation and intubation of new-borns are considered to be AGPs and although the absolute risk to HCW performing these procedures on new-born infants is thought to be low, appropriate IPC precautions including use of appropriate PPE are recommended:

1. As soon as the infant is stabilised after birth, they should be placed in an enclosed incubator.
2. Where admission to a neonatal unit is required for an infant of a mother with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection the neonate should be isolated in an enclosed incubator in a single room where possible. Appropriate isolation signage should be in place.
3. Staff caring for infants of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infants should wear appropriate PPE.
4. The duration of transmission-based precautions should be discussed on a case-by-case basis with the local IPCT.

Acute Mental Health Facilities/Units

The IPC requirements for care of people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 are the same for patients in Acute Mental Health services as in other acute services. However, there may be specific challenges related to the patient's overall care needs. One of the challenges which require planning relates to care of patients with impaired spatial awareness.

Therefore, if a patient is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, the recommended IPC precautions should be instituted as above, but may be subject to the following considerations:

1. Isolation in a single room may be associated with specific risks in relation to the overall care needs of some patients, which may make this impractical to apply. Consultation with public health and/or IPC specialists should be considered in these cases to determine the best level of IPC practice that can be achieved in the circumstances.
2. If the patient cannot be placed in a single room, but can tolerate wearing a surgical face mask, this may help to reduce risk of exposure for other patients and staff.
3. If isolation in a single room is not practical or is not safe, consideration should be given to how the patient can be cared for in ways that maintain a distance of 2m from other patients and from staff to the greatest extent possible and in a space that can be adequately ventilated. For

example, if there is a bay or area available where the person has as little contact as possible with other patients.

4. If there is more than one inpatient with COVID-19 they should be accommodated in the same clinical area whenever possible. Please refer to cohorting section.
5. Staff should follow IPC practice including use of PPE as outlined in 'recommendation for the use of PPE section'.
6. If the wearing of a surgical face mask by staff creates practical difficulties in interacting with the patient, a clear full face visor worn correctly will substantially reduce exposure of staff to droplets in a low-risk scenario. The visor or face shield should be sufficient in width and length to cover the face e.g. extends below the chin and provides cover to the side. For use in healthcare the face shield should conform to the required specifications (EU PPE Regulation 2016/425, EN16 or equivalent).
7. However, as face visors are generally not considered to afford the same level of protection as a surgical face mask, they should not be worn as a substitute for a surgical face mask or FFP2 mask in high risk scenarios (e.g. when caring for a patient with suspected/confirmed COVID-19). Note however that the risk in situations where mask use is not practical is much lower for staff who are fully vaccinated and with patients who are fully vaccinated.
8. If the patient is mobile, facilitating access to a safe outdoor location where possible may be helpful in reducing risk of exposure of other patients and staff.
9. There is rarely a justification on IPC grounds to impede access by a patient to a second opinion, peer support or legal advice if the service provider has been informed of the risk, accepts that risk and is supported in managing the risk to themselves.
10. IPC measures required to minimise risk for those offering a second opinion, peer support or legal representatives are those outlined in the main document, as appropriate for any member of staff providing care.
11. A risk assessment should be completed before electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is undertaken. In situations where this procedure is urgent and the patient is a suspect/confirmed case of COVID-19 or a contact of a case of COVID-19, ECT should be carried out as an AGP, with IPC measures for AGP outlined in this guidance to be followed.
12. Some patients may need to go home on visits or overnight stays as part of the process of preparing for discharge. This is very low risk for patients who are fully vaccinated. Patients who are fully vaccinated and are readmitted to the facility after weekend leave are not required to be isolated after they return from such leave.
13. For those who are not fully vaccinated, going home as part of the process of preparing for discharge is accepted as a key part of the therapeutic process; it is associated with a risk of exposure to COVID-19 during the visit and consequently a risk of introduction of COVID-19 into the healthcare setting on their return. A risk assessment should be performed in advance of the visit and a plan developed with the patient and other members of the household to minimise

risk of exposure during the visit. The plan should also specify any specific requirements for additional IPC precaution or testing required when the patient returns to the hospital.

14. Staff visiting the services to provide sessional care/therapy are not restricted in delivering the service and should follow appropriate IPC measures at all times, including; getting vaccinated, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, physical distancing and appropriate PPE, as outlined in this guidance for acute hospitals. If visiting staff are fully vaccinated the associated risk is much less.
15. Dedicated rooms for family meetings and group therapy in the service should be organised to meet IPC guidance to the greatest degree practical.

Community Hospitals and Post-acute Rehabilitation Facilities

There are a number of specific challenges for community hospitals and rehabilitation centres. They are in some respects more similar to acute hospitals than to long-term residential care facilities (LTRCFs).

1. Many have very few single patient rooms and are largely dependent on multi-bed rooms that is two, four, six bed or larger areas.
2. They have higher turnover, as the length-of-stay is typically two to four weeks, even though it is understood that some patients may have longer lengths-of-stay as part of their rehabilitation.
3. Patients may require very intensive therapy to support their rehabilitation and return to the greatest possible level of independent function.
4. The following guidance is provided to address the specific challenges managed by these facilities.
5. In facilities where care is provided for both long-term care residents and for short stay patients, distinct wards and areas should be identified, to meet the different requirements for care of both groups.
6. The facility should have plans in place for the management of patients who develop symptoms during their admission. This includes planning for isolation of symptomatic patients and isolation or cohorting of COVID-19 contacts should the need arise.
7. The vaccination status of every person should be determined before admission or as soon as possible after admission.
8. All patients are assessed before admission to ensure that their vaccination status is known and recorded. It should also be determined if they are known COVID-19 contacts or have clinical symptoms suggestive of COVID-19.
9. Whenever practical and consistent with the vaccination programme, the patient should be fully vaccinated prior to transfer from an acute hospital to the rehabilitation setting, unless there is a medical contraindication to vaccination. If this is not practical for any

- reason vaccination should be offered to eligible patients as soon as possible after transfer.
10. A single dose of vaccine does not represent full vaccination therefore all recommended infection prevention and control measures continue to apply after transfer for 14 days after transfer unless the patient is fully vaccinated.
 11. Patients who are fully vaccinated or have had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months do not require testing for COVID-19 prior to or after admission if they have no symptoms.
 12. If they are not fully vaccinated or they have not had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months people should be tested for COVID-19 either within the three days BEFORE admission (particularly for transfers from an acute facility) or within one day AFTER admission. Testing after admission applies, for example, when coming from the community if testing in advance of admission cannot be arranged. For elective admissions from the community, testing in the community before admission should be the norm if testing is required. If there are exceptional reasons why this cannot be done, admission should not be delayed but the test should be performed promptly after admission (as above).
 13. With these controls in place, patients can be admitted to a multi-bed cohort area with other newly-admitted patients, if there are no available single rooms and provided there is no other requirement for transmission-based precautions. The risk of cohorting is much reduced if the patients in the cohort area are fully vaccinated.
 14. Where cohorting new patients in a multi-bed area is necessary, the cohort areas for admission should include as few beds as possible (for example, a 2-bed or 4-bed area is preferred to a 6- bed area).
 15. Where practical to do so, those admitted from the community and who have required testing, and are awaiting test results should be accommodated in a single room or in separate areas, until the test result is available and reported as SARS-CoV-2 RNA not detected.
 16. During the initial 14-day period, patients who are not fully vaccinated should remain in the cohort area as much as is practical and avoid contact with other patients in the facility.
 17. Patients who are fully vaccinated and where there is not clinical suspicion of COVID-19 can interact with other patients who are fully vaccinated and can access shared space as required to progress their rehabilitation during the initial 14 days.
 18. As at all times, staff caring for patients should apply standard precautions plus a surgical face mask when caring for all patients.
 19. Where patients leave the cohort area for therapy or other reasons, then they should not mix with patients from other areas unless they are fully vaccinated. Group therapy activities can be arranged for members of the same cohort even if they are not fully vaccinated if they are asymptomatic at the time.
 20. Where practical patients who are not fully vaccinated should be encouraged to wear a mask when they are not in their bed space and if they choose to wear a mask for most of the time, including in their bed space, this should be facilitated.

21. Asymptomatic patients who are fully vaccinated should be encouraged to wear a mask when they are not in their bed space, but when visiting in a room or sharing a room with one other patient who is fully vaccinated they need not wear a mask or observe physical distancing.
22. Each cohort area should have designated bathing and toilet facilities, where practical to do so. Where this is not practical, the bathing and toilet facilities should be shared with the lowest possible number of other patients.
23. All patients should be monitored twice daily for symptoms of COVID-19.
24. Patients should be advised not to share personal items, including food/drink though this need not apply to two people who are fully vaccinated and who share a two-bed room.
25. Please note that cohorting may not be appropriate for mobile patients with behavioural challenges and is much less important if they are fully vaccinated.
26. Patients who are not fully vaccinated should remain in their cohort area, in so far as is practical until 14 days have elapsed. If patients in the cohort area are not all admitted on the same day, then the 14 days must elapse after the date of admission of the last patient to the cohort area.
27. At the end of the 14 days, patients may remain together or one or more patients can transfer to other areas of the facility.
28. Patients who are fully vaccinated and have transferred from the Community / Rehabilitation unit to acute hospital for a period of investigation or treatment of an inter-current illness do not need to remain in single room / cohort isolation on return.
29. Patients who are fully vaccinated may have weekend leave from the rehabilitation facility where this is part of the discharge planning process with appropriate precautions being observed while the patient is away from the facility. Patients who are fully vaccinated readmitted to the facility after weekend leave are not required to be isolated after they return from such leave.

Transfer

Internal Transfer

1. Minimise movement of the patient from the single room or designated cohort area.
2. Patients should wear a surgical face mask when outside their room or designated cohort area.
3. HCWs in the receiving departments should be informed of the precautions required prior to the transfer of the patient (for example diagnostic departments, operating theatre).
4. Investigations should be scheduled so that patients are not waiting in communal areas.
5. Cleaning and decontamination of the patient's room or bed space in a cohort area, along

with equipment should be undertaken following completion of the procedure.

External Transfer

1. Transfer of patients with confirmed COVID-19 to another hospital should be avoided, unless it is required for medical care.
2. If transfer is required, it is the responsibility of the transferring facility to inform in advance, the HCW in the receiving facility and the ambulance personnel of the diagnosis, the date of symptom onset and the precautions required.
3. In keeping with written communication issued by the HSE's Chief Clinical Officer, transfer of patients should not be refused or delayed, pending results of testing for SARS-CoV-2. Testing of asymptomatic individuals as a condition of transfer is not acceptable. However, surveillance testing on arrival at the receiving hospital is appropriate, in line with requirements for testing other admissions (March 19th 2020).

Guidance on the transfer of hospitalised patients from an acute hospital to a residential care facility

Refer to Appendix 2 and section 'Community Hospitals and Rehabilitation Facilities'.

Transfer from primary care/community settings using hospital transport systems (e.g., Oncology Day Care)

Patients attending for essential care (Oncology) should be advised to contact their usual care unit by telephone if they have new symptoms consistent with COVID-19, rather than presenting themselves.

Patients who have been in close contact with someone who has suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection should be instructed to advise the unit in advance of attending.

Patients should be advised to check their temperature before travelling.

Patients who have no symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 and who have not been diagnosed as asymptomatic infectious cases by testing can travel by their usual means.

Asymptomatic patients who have been informed that they are close contacts of person with COVID-19 infection will be following public health advice for restricted movement unless they are fully vaccinated or have had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months. If they are fully vaccinated or

have had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months they will generally be able to travel by their usual means unless there is a specific clinical or public health concern.

If they are restricting their movements they may drive themselves to the unit or be driven by someone who is willing to drive them (units should have arrangements in place in the event this is not possible). They should not use public transport or travel with another patient from the unit. The patient should be advised to:

1. Wash hands with soap and water before leaving their house or use hand sanitiser.
2. In so far as is possible, maintain two metre distance from other individuals in the car unless they are members of the same household (e.g., sit in the backseat passenger side away from the driver). In so far as practical taking account of weather and comfort increase ventilation by opening a window.
3. The patient should be advised to wear a face covering or surgical face mask unless travelling with a member of their own household.

Patients who have symptoms of possible COVID-19 must telephone in advance of their appointment and if necessary, may drive themselves to the unit, if they feel well enough or be driven in private transport by someone who has already had exposure and is willing to drive them. If they have a surgical face mask this should be worn, if tolerated for transfer to the hospital. Where this is not possible, the unit should have alternative arrangements in place.

Transfer/discharge to home care services

1. When a patient is being discharged home to receive ongoing care in that setting, ensure that information relating to their COVID-19 testing and vaccination status is communicated to the home care team in advance of their first attendance. This information should include information on COVID-19 vaccination status, dates and results of any COVID-19 tests done while in hospital, residential care or other care setting. In particular the home care team and transport staff will need to know whether the person is within the infectious period.
2. In a ward or setting with active transmission of COVID-19 a test in the three days before discharge should generally be performed in patients who are not fully vaccinated or has not have COVID-19 in the previous 9 months.
3. Consider providing patient-held short note containing this information that can be reviewed by the home care team at each visit.
4. IPC advice for staff in home care teams is available at <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/homecarevisitsguidance/>

Care of the Dying

1. A compassionate, pragmatic and proportionate approach is required in the care of the dying. If an accompanying person is fully vaccinated or has had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months there is generally very little risk to them or to others in accompanying the dying person. If the person dying is fully vaccinated or has had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months there is generally little risk to those accompanying them.
2. The presence of a person close to the individual should be facilitated, but they should be aware of the potential infection risk.
3. Pastoral care team where requested by the person or their family should NOT be restricted from entering an isolation room or cohort area.
4. All persons in attendance should be advised to wear a surgical face mask and plastic apron.
5. Gloves are not essential for skin-to-skin contact, so long as those in attendance understand the risks; perform hand hygiene after touching the person and before leaving the room.
6. Visitors should be instructed on how to put on and take off the PPE & how to perform hand hygiene. Where practical, visitors should be supervised when donning and doffing PPE.
7. If specific religious rites require direct transient physical contact with the skin, gloves are not necessary, so long as hand hygiene is performed after touching the person.

Care of the Deceased with Confirmed COVID-19 Infection

Autopsy

Please refer to the RCPI Faculty of Pathology guidance for performing autopsy procedures.

Communication of level of risk

It is understandable that those who will be handling the remains will be concerned and may wish to be made aware of the patient's infectious status.

Hygienic preparation

1. Any IPC procedures that have been advised before death must be continued in handling the deceased person after death. In relation to COVID-19, specifically if transmission-based precautions have been discontinued before death, then they are not required after death – see section on duration of transmission-based precautions.
2. Hygienic preparation includes; washing of the face and hands, closing the mouth and eyes, tidying the hair and in some cases, shaving the face.
3. Washing or preparing the body for religious reasons is acceptable if those carrying out the task wear long-sleeved gowns, gloves, a surgical face mask and eye protection if there is a risk of splashing, which should be discarded after use.

Transport to the Mortuary of a person deceased during the infectious period

1. An inner lining is not required in terms of COVID-19 risk, as per WHO guidance, but may be required for other, practical reasons such as maintaining dignity or preventing leakage affecting the mortuary environment.
2. A face mask or similar should be placed over the mouth of the deceased before lifting the remains into the inner lining.
3. Those physically handling the body and placing the body into the inner lining should wear the following PPE: Gloves, long-sleeved gown, surgical face mask.
4. Pay close attention to hand hygiene after removal of PPE.
5. Once in the hospital mortuary, it would be acceptable to open the inner lining if used for family viewing only (the mortuary attendant should wear PPE to open the inner lining as above).
6. The family should be advised not to kiss the deceased and should clean their hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water after touching the deceased.
7. Once the body has been placed in the coffin, PPE is not required for transfer or for other parts of the funeral or burial process. The unnecessary wearing of PPE during the burial and other public events can cause significant distress to families and should be avoided when not required.

Handling personal possessions of the Deceased

1. Most jewellery, including watches, rings, bracelets, earrings and items like photo frames can be wiped down using a detergent/disinfectant wipe. Alternatively, items of jewellery (with the exception of watches) can be placed in hot soapy water and cleaned first, then rinsed and dried using disposable paper towel.
2. Items of clothing and soft toys should be placed directly into a washing machine and washed on the hottest setting that the fabric can withstand.
3. Paper materials, such as prayer books/religious texts or items that cannot be wiped should be placed in a plastic bag and left aside for 72 hours before handling.
4. Clothing that needs to be washed by hand should be placed in a plastic bag and stored for 72 hours, after which it can be washed.
5. Personal belongings that family members wish to discard should be placed in a plastic bag and tied securely, then placed in a second plastic bag and set aside for 72 hours, after which it can go out for collection in the general waste.

Other Acute Services Supporting Patient Care

Laboratory

1. For information in relation to laboratory processes, refer to *Biosafety guidance for diagnostic laboratories handling specimens from individuals with possible or confirmed infection with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2)* available at: <https://www.hpsc.ie/az/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/laboratoryguidance/>
2. Double bagging of specimens at time of collection is not required. Care should be taken not to contaminate the outside of the bag.
3. Laboratory specimens, including those from COVID-19 patients can be sent by pneumatic tube systems, in line with standard operating procedures.
4. Blood cultures can be collected, as per standard procedures.
5. HCWs collecting samples should contact laboratory HCWs when specimens are submitted from a patient with suspected or confirmed infection, through proper completion of request forms or electronic test ordering systems, or by direct communication with the laboratory. Transport of specimens between laboratories should be in accordance with Category B transportation regulations.

Point-of-Care / Near Patient Testing

If point-of-care testing/ near patient testing is performed on potentially-infectious specimens it must be performed following risk assessment and in accordance with a clearly defined process to manage the risks associated with handling samples outside of a biocontainment level 2 laboratory [Detailed guidance on performance of antigen testing is outside the scope of this document].

If point-of-care/ near patient blood gas analysis is necessary to manage a critically ill patient, the incremental risk to the HCW beyond the risk of delivering direct patient care is likely to be minimal and it may be performed with the following precautions:

1. The operator must adhere to standard, contact and droplet precautions throughout the blood specimen collection at the patient's bedside.
2. The needle should be removed and disposed of safely and the adaptor applied to the tip of the syringe. If air must be expelled from the sampling syringe, this should be performed in the patient care zone with the syringe pointing away from the operator.
3. Ideally a blood gas analysis machine should be placed within the patient room if repeat testing is likely to be required. If a blood gas analysis machine is not in the patient room, then the syringe should be laid flat in a disposable tray with deep sides for transport to the blood gas analyser.
4. Remove PPE and perform hand hygiene on leaving the patient room. Apply clean gloves and

transfer specimen to a clean disposable tray and take the tray with the specimen to the blood gas analyser.

5. The analysis of the specimen may be performed as normal, using standard precautions.
6. The residual blood in the syringe should be discarded as per standard practice and the instrument and its surroundings are cleaned/disinfected after use.

Pharmacy

Medication delivery

Once medication delivery boxes/totes/chute capsules/reusable bags etc. have not been in direct contact with the immediate environment of COVID-19 patients AND provided standard precautions have been carried out by all staff, additional decontamination of these receptacles is not required over and above routine cleaning.

Medication returns to the Pharmacy

Hospital-issued medication that forms part of ward stock in drug presses or drug trolley: Provided standard precautions have been carried out by all staff, the return of medicines from a COVID-19 ward should follow usual procedures.

Patient Care Equipment/Instruments/Devices

1. Reusable non-invasive medical devices should as far as it is possible be allocated to the individual patient or for use by a designated cohort of patients with appropriate decontamination between each patient use.
2. These items (including stethoscopes) can be reused, with appropriate decontamination after patient use, after blood and body fluid contamination and at regular intervals, as part of the equipment cleaning schedule.
3. Manufacturer's instructions should be followed for cleaning and disinfecting of reusable medical equipment after use.
4. Increase the frequency of cleaning/disinfection for reusable non-invasive care equipment when used in isolation or cohort areas.
5. Single-use items must be discarded after use, in line with standard procedures.
6. Staff should increase the frequency of cleaning of electronic equipment, such as mobile and desk phones, tablets, desktop touch screens, keyboards, printer touch screens. A supply of wipes should be available in areas where the devices are most commonly used.

Mobile healthcare equipment

1. The following advice applies to devices that cannot be left in the isolation room, such as portable X-ray machines and portable electronic devices used in patient care:
2. The use of mobile healthcare equipment should be restricted to essential functions, as far as possible to minimise the range of equipment taken into and later removed from the room.
3. The operator of the device must have had training in IPC procedures, including hand hygiene and use of PPE.
4. The operator should perform hand hygiene and wear PPE, as described earlier in this document, when in the isolation room or cohort area.
5. Any equipment taken in to the room, which must be subsequently removed, needs to be cleaned and disinfected immediately after leaving the area.
6. Any additional items, such as a digital detector or a cassette will also need to be cleaned and disinfected in a similar fashion, regardless of whether there has been direct contact with the patient or not. This is due to the risk of environmental contamination of the equipment within the isolation room.
7. Personal digital assistants (PDAs) that are used with electronic blood tracking systems.
8. PDAs and wireless printers, where used should be dedicated for use in cohort areas for confirmed/suspected COVID-19 patients and should not be used in non-COVID-19 areas.
9. Due to the requirement for HCW to wear PPE, they will be unable to scan their ID badge. Therefore, they should bring a photocopy of their badge to the bedside for the PDA. The photocopy should be discarded in the healthcare risk waste bin in the room
10. After use, devices should be decontaminated in line with usual local policy. No additional precautions are required.
11. It is important to check the cleaning guidelines accompanying each device. If a particular device is not capable of being adequately decontaminated (e.g., PDA with touch pads/buttons), they should not be used in these areas. If their use is unavoidable, consider using a single-use, self-adhesive protective film to cover the device and dispose of film after use.

Mobile Device Use in the Clinical Setting

Although there is limited evidence that directly links the use of mobile devices with an increase in healthcare-associated infections, a number of studies have shown that mobile devices can act as potential sources for pathogenic bacteria, including *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Klebsiella spp.* and other organisms.

The increasing use of mobile phones and tablets present unique challenges in the healthcare setting, because they are frequently touched by the hands of HCWs (with and without gloves), they are used in multiple patient rooms and other potentially contaminated environments or are carried in

pockets or on lanyards.

1. It is important that all mobile devices, including tablet computers, mobile phones and personal digital assistant devices (PDAs) are used and managed safely, to minimise the risk of cross- infection and ensure patient care and safety is not compromised.
2. Do not bring personal mobile devices with you when attending to a patient who requires transmission-based precautions, when performing any activity that requires extended close patient contact or when performing an aseptic technique.
3. HCWs must perform hand hygiene as per the 'WHO 5 moments' before and after each patient interaction and before and after touching any device.
4. Before using a mobile device, remove your gloves and perform hand hygiene.
5. Avoid placing mobile devices on a patient's bed or locker (consider IT stands or trolleys).
6. Avoid inappropriate use of a mobile device during clinical procedures. If a HCW has to take a call or text, they should remove themselves from the activity, remove their gloves and clean their hands.
7. Mobile devices should not be used inside isolation rooms, home or cohort zone of infected patients/people, unless for essential use, when a risk assessment will be required.
8. If a mobile device must be used inside the isolation or cohort zone of patients with suspected/confirmed COVID-19, ensure the device is cleaned and disinfected before, in between patients and after use.
9. Alternatively, consider the use of a protective cover, bag or film where appropriate.
10. Ensure all mobile devices are intact to allow effective cleaning/disinfection.
11. Mobile devices for use in the clinical environment should be of a design that allows them to be appropriately decontaminated. For example, an intact case/cover that will withstand cleaning and disinfection.
12. HCWs should adhere to local policies about which cleaning product (wipe or solution) to use for decontaminating mobile devices.
13. Devices should be intact to allow effective cleaning/disinfection. For example, without cracked screen, casing or cover.
14. Accessories including charging lead and bluetooth keypads are intact, with no wires bare, no cracks in plugs or case, to allow effective cleaning/disinfection.
15. Devices used for clinical care/treatment/management must be cleaned/disinfected before, in between patients and after use.
16. Devices given to an inpatient for use must be cleaned at least twice daily and cleaned/disinfected before use by another patient.
17. Tablets or touch screens located in public places with open access must be cleaned at least twice daily or more frequently if the device is visibly contaminated.
18. Charging cabinets should be included in the cleaning schedule, as per manufacturer's

instructions. HCWs should always clean their own personal devices at least daily or at the beginning and end of each shift.

19. Mobile devices should not be used in an isolation room or cohort area for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients without assessing the risk.

General Environment

1. The care environment should be kept clean and clutter-free to facilitate cleaning.
2. Consideration should be given as to how ventilation can be practically achieved in each setting. It is best to avoid the use of fans that re-circulate air.
3. All non-essential items should be removed. This is to prevent unnecessary waste of essential supplies, which may occur if unused items in an area become contaminated.
4. Only the minimum amount of equipment and supplies essential to patient care each day should be stored within an isolation room, ante-room or cohort area. Consider increasing the frequency of topping-up stock to achieve this.
5. Patient observation charts, medication prescription and administration records (drug kardexes) and healthcare records should not be taken into the isolation room or patient zone within a designated cohort area to minimise the risk of contamination.
6. The risk of acquiring infection from contact with surfaces is low and risk from interacting with healthcare records or paper charts is thought to be extremely low. This low risk can be mitigated by staff cleaning hands after touching surfaces. In this case, staff would be advised to clean hands before and in particular after handling the charts or paper records. There is no recommendation or need to hold paper charts or records in any form of quarantine.
7. If an electronic patient health record (EHR) is used in the facility, a mobile workstation for the EHR should remain in the cohort area.

Routine cleaning

See Interim Guideline for Infection Prevention and Control for the Health Service Executive 2020.

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/microbiologyantimicrobialresistance/infectioncontrolandhai/guidelines/Interim%20HSE%20Guidance%20on%20IPC.pdf>

General deployment of new technologies for cleaning and disinfection of the healthcare environment is not recommended in the absence of evidence that they impact on the transmission of COVID-19.

Terminal Cleaning

Terminal cleaning is performed after the patient has vacated the room and is not expected to return (e.g., following patient discharge or transfer). In addition to the routine cleaning protocols, a terminal clean requires:

1. Removal of all detachable objects from a room or cohort area, including laundry and curtains;
2. Removal of disposable items, including paper towels and toilet paper;
3. Removal of waste (See Appendix 4);
4. Cleaning (wiping) of lighting and ventilation components on the ceiling;
5. Cleaning of curtain rails and the upper surfaces of hard-to-reach fixtures and fittings;
6. Cleaning of all other sites and surfaces, working from higher up downwards to floor;
7. A terminal clean checklist is good practice to support cleaning or household staff to effectively complete all environmental cleaning tasks, which should be signed off by the cleaning supervisor before the room reopens for occupancy by a new patient.

Unused Medication, Blood Products and PPE

Do not discard unused medicines or PPE that have been in close proximity to a COVID-19 case (for example contents of a crash tray or wrap or an intubation kit). If necessary, decontaminate medicine boxes/outer packaging with alcohol 70% wipes or disinfectant wipes. A partially-consumed medication tray/wrap/kit should be refurbished or replenished, as per local hospital arrangements.

Unused blood components that were brought into an isolation room or cohort area should not be discarded due to concerns about COVID-19, so long as they meet local haemovigilance criteria for return. If there is concern about surface contamination, then decontaminate the outer surface of the blood component bag using alcohol 70% wipes or disinfectant wipes.

Catering

There is no need to use disposable plates or cutlery. Crockery and cutlery can be washed in a dishwasher, or by hand using household detergent and hand-hot water after use.

Where practical, catering staff should not bring the catering trolley into a cohort area.

If a HCW is already in a cohort area and wearing PPE, that person could take the meal trays from the catering staff member at the entrance to the area and deliver them to each patient, so that catering staff do not need to enter the cohort area.

If catering staff do need to enter the cohort area and will be within two metres distance of a patient, they should wear appropriate PPE.

Water coolers

Hospitals should assess the risk associated with transmission of COVID-19 associated with communal water coolers and reusable drinking receptacles particularly in clinical areas. Where there is an identified risk, the water coolers should be decommissioned and an alternative drinking water supply provided.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

See Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for the Health Service Executive 2020.

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/microbiologyantimicrobialresistance/infectioncontrolandhai/guidelines/Interim%20HSE%20Guidance%20on%20IPC.pdf>

Good IPC practice including use of PPE are important but are not a substitute for vaccination.

1. The requirement for PPE is based on the tasks that a HCW is likely to perform;
2. The hospital IPC team should review any new items of PPE for suitability and consider if existing guidance for staff requires updating, to ensure it is compatible with the new item of PPE;
3. On April 21st 2020, the COVID-19 National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) recommended extension of the use of surgical masks in healthcare settings to the following;
4. Surgical masks should be worn by HCW when they are providing care to people and are within 2m of that person, even if COVID-19 is not suspected; regardless of the COVID-19 status of the person;
5. Surgical masks should be worn by all HCW for all encounters, of 15 minutes or more, with other HCW in the workplace where a distance of 2m cannot be maintained;
6. For the purpose of this guidance, HCW should don a mask if they anticipate being within 2m or more of other HCW for a continuous period of 15 minutes or longer. It is not intended that the HCW should attempt to estimate in the morning the total duration of a sequence of very brief encounters that may occur during the day;
7. As of September 2020, HCW are also required to wear a surgical mask when in busy public areas of healthcare facilities, even if they do not expect to be within a distance of 2m of another person for 15 minutes or more;
8. Healthcare workers should have access to a well-fitted respirator mask (FFP2) and eye protection when in contact with possible or confirmed COVID-19 cases and COVID-19

contacts;

9. In the context of a ward/unit based outbreak it is appropriate to consider all patients in that setting as suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases while active transmission is ongoing. Decisions regarding when all patients should be considered as suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases requiring use of general use of FFP2 masks should be made by the IPC team and outbreak control team;
10. A surgical mask and visor also offer a high degree of protection. These may be more comfortable for and preferred by some staff;
11. A surgical mask remains appropriate for non-patient facing activity (for example interacting with colleagues or students) and when caring for patients where there is no suspicion of COVID-19 and there is no evidence of transmission in the service.
12. Wearing of masks when providing care for certain categories of patient, for example patients who may need to lip-read, can present practical difficulties for patient care. In such circumstances, it is appropriate to perform an institutional risk assessment and to consider alternatives to mask use, such as use of a perspex screen/barrier or visor that manages the risk of transmission of COVID-19. The risk for staff members is much reduced if they are fully vaccinated or have had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months;
13. PPE must be worn by ALL staff entering a room or cohort area where a patient with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 is being cared for;
14. PPE should be readily available outside the patient's room or cohort area;
15. Have a colleague observe donning and doffing of PPE where practical.

Extended use of PPE

1. Extended use of PPE for the sole purpose of limiting demand for PPE is not appropriate, as adequate supplies of PPE are available;
2. It is recognised that in certain circumstances such as when working in a cohort area or ward dedicated to patients with COVID-19, extended use of certain items of PPE when moving between patients may be considered to facilitate working and to reduce potential HCW exposure related to very frequent donning and removal of PPE. Where measures vary from usual practice, it is necessary to ensure the lowest possible risk to patients and HCWs. Extended use means that certain items of PPE (gown, face mask, eye protection) may be used while attending to a series of patients with COVID-19 in succession in a single period of clinical activity in one ward or unit;
3. Gowns should normally be changed between patients and after completion of a procedure or task. However, if necessary to cope with workload and to reduce exposure risk associated with very frequent changes of PPE;
4. Extended use of gowns in confirmed COVID-19 cohort areas may be considered for HCWs

engaged in low contact activities although for these activities, a disposable apron is often appropriate;

5. Where HCW are engaged in high contact activities, then gowns should be changed between patients, to minimise risk of cross-transmission of other pathogens commonly encountered in healthcare settings (e.g., antimicrobial resistant organisms, such as CPE, MRSA, VRE or *C. difficile*);
6. If PPE is wet, soiled or torn it must be doffed and disposed of;
7. It is not appropriate to continue to wear PPE that was used in care of patients with COVID-19 when moving between wards or units or when moving from a clinical care area to a designated office space or break area on the ward or unit;
8. Extended use of gloves is not appropriate. Gloves must be changed and hand hygiene performed between patients and sometimes between different care activities on the same patient;
9. Double-gloving is not appropriate in the context of caring for patients with COVID-19;
10. Cleaning gloves with ABHR is not appropriate. If there is a concern that gloves are contaminated, they must be removed safely, hand hygiene performed and a fresh pair of gloves donned if required to continue that task.

Types of PPE

Gloves: All gloves are disposable, single-use items. Gloves can be made of latex or non-latex material such as nitrile. Nitrile gloves are used routinely in the HSE to avoid risks associated with latex hypersensitivity. Gloves should be powder free. Vinyl gloves should not be used unless there are no acceptable alternatives as they are prone to leakage and tearing. Polythene i.e. plastic gloves are not suitable for clinical use.

Disposable plastic aprons are recommended to protect staff uniform and clothes from contamination when providing direct patient care and when carrying out environmental and equipment decontamination. Disposable plastic aprons are suitable for low contact activity.

Fluid resistant gowns are recommended when there is a risk of extensive splashing of blood and or other body fluids, and a disposable plastic apron does not provide adequate cover to protect a HCW's uniform or clothing.

Fluid resistant coveralls provide equivalent protection to fluid resistant long-sleeved gowns if worn, donned and doffed correctly. However, they can be more challenging to doff correctly and specific training is required for HCW who may need to use these items of PPE.

If **non-fluid resistant gowns** are used and there is a risk of splashing with blood or other body fluids, a disposable plastic apron should be worn over or underneath the gown.

Eye protection: healthcare workers must have access to eye protection as well as a well fitted respirator mask (FFP2) to use as required when caring for patients with possible or confirmed COVID-19. Eye protection such as a full face shield/ visor or goggles / safety spectacles should be worn when there is a risk of contamination to the eyes from splashing of blood, body fluids, excretions or secretions (including respiratory secretions). Eye protection is also required if present during an AGP associated with an increased risk of infection. Use of eye protection is not necessary as a routine every time a healthcare worker enters the room of a person with COVID-19 or a COVID-19 cohort area and the absence of eye protection does not of itself represent a breach of appropriate PPE use although it is significant if the healthcare worker was delivering personal care to a coughing or sneezing patient.

Face visors as an alternative to surgical face masks in low-risk scenarios

In low risk situations, such as when caring for people who are not suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, and where the wearing of a surgical face mask by the HCW creates a significant barrier to the delivery of effective clinical care, then use of a correctly worn face visor rather than a surgical mask may be considered. The visor or face shield should be sufficient in width and length to cover the face (e.g. extends below the chin and provides cover to the side). For use in a healthcare setting, the visor or face shield should conform to the required specifications (EU PPE Regulation 2016/425, EN 166, ANSI/ISEA Z87.1 or equivalent)

However, as face visors are generally not considered to afford the same level of protection as a surgical facemask against droplet transmitted infection, they should not be worn as a substitute for a surgical mask in high risk scenarios, for example, when caring for a patient with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 or their contacts.

When performing or assisting with an AGP on a person with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 a respirator mask is always required in addition to a visor or goggles.

Surgical face masks

The WHO recommends surgical facemasks should have good breathability, internal and external faces which can be clearly identified, and meet EN14683 standard for Type II or higher. This applies to masks used by HCWs and patients.

Type IIR masks should be worn where there is a high risk of splashing by bodily fluids for example in the operating theatre, critical care unit and emergency department setting, where a patient's condition may be unstable or acutely deteriorating.

Tips for surgical face masks:

1. The mask must be donned appropriately, to allow for easy removal without touching the front of the mask;
2. Must cover the nose and mouth of the wearer;
3. Must not be allowed to dangle around the HCW's neck;
4. Must not be touched once in place;
5. Must be changed when wet or torn or if removed to eat, drink or use a phone;
6. Perform hand hygiene after the surgical face mask is removed.

Appendix 1 sets out Preliminary Guidance on Facial Hair & Respiratory Protection in the healthcare setting in the context of COVID-19 and other pathogens transmitted by the same route

Respirator masks

1. Respirator masks are routinely recommended for the care of patients with known airborne infectious diseases, including; varicella (chickenpox) and measles viruses and pulmonary tuberculosis (TB);
2. COVID-19 is primarily transmitted by contact and droplet routes. Airborne transmission can also occur in some circumstances. Accounts of experience in hospitals in Ireland since the dissemination of the B.1.1.7 variant are a cause for concern in particular in relation to use of high flow oxygen devices (an AGP);
3. Airborne spread is a particular risk when AGPs associated with an increased risk of infection are performed. Vaccination of staff is critical to protection in that context. In addition respirator masks (FFP2 masks or other appropriate respiratory protection) and eye protection are required in all cases;
4. Check to determine if respirator masks are fluid repellent. If respirator masks are not fluid repellent, additional protection, such as a visor, is required in situations where there is a splash risk.

Valved Respirator masks

Valved respirator masks should generally not be used. The purpose of a respirator's exhalation valve is to reduce the breathing resistance during exhalation. The valve is designed to open during exhalation to allow exhaled air to exit the respirator and then close tightly during inhalation, so inhaled air is not permitted to enter the respirator through the valve. A person who may have COVID-19 should not wear a valved respirator, because there is a possibility that exhaled particles may leave the respirator via the valve and enter the surrounding environment.

Face coverings - patients

In line with NPHET recommendations, patients and anyone accompanying them arriving at the

hospital should be reminded to wear a cloth face covering (unless they are under 13 years or cannot tolerate wearing the face covering) or surgical mask (for certain groups). If they do not have a cloth face covering, they should be provided with a facemask at reception/registration.

Patients who present with respiratory symptoms should be asked to wear a surgical facemask, pending clinical assessment. If they are tested for SARS-CoV-2, they should continue to wear the mask if tolerated until their respiratory viral test result is available to inform an assessment of further precautions required.

Patients in whom there is no clinical suspicion of COVID-19, but who are tested for COVID-19 for surveillance purposes should be encouraged to continue to wear the surgical face mask until the admission test result is available, if it is feasible to do so.

Patients accommodated in a single room are not required to wear a surgical face mask while in the room, but should wear it when outside of the room if they can do so.

Patients accommodated in multi-occupancy accommodation are not required to wear a surgical face mask while in their bed space, as it would likely not be feasible for all patients in that space to wear a surgical face mask at all times (for example during eating, drinking, sleeping, patients with behavioural disturbance or underlying respiratory conditions etc.).

However, if a patient expresses their preference to wear a surgical face mask or face covering for most of the time while they are accommodated in multi-occupancy accommodation, they should be facilitated to do so. Patients who are leaving their bed-space in a multi-occupancy accommodation should be asked to wear a surgical facemask if tolerated until they return to their bed-space.

In the event that patients refuse to use a cloth face covering or mask in situations where they are recommended healthcare workers should try to determine the nature of the person's objection and ensure that they understand that they are being asked to wear the mask to protect patients and staff. If they insist that they will not wear a mask consider if they are willing to wear a visor which may reduce risk to some degree. Patients cannot be refused care on the basis that they decline to wear a mask. If that situation arises the risk must be managed by other elements of good infection prevention and control practice. If patients and staff have been vaccinated the risk to staff related to patient non-adherence to mask use is likely to be reduced.

Fit testing

The Health and Safety Authority indicate that where a risk assessment indicates that HCW need to use a close-fitting respirator mask for their protection that every effort should be made to comply with the requirement for fit testing of the worker, as far as is reasonably practicable. When fit testing of all staff is not immediately possible, then fit testing should be prioritised for those at greatest risk. Priority groups for fit testing include the following:

1. HCW most likely to be involved in performing AGPs, in particular endotracheal intubation;
2. HCWs most likely to have the most prolonged exposure to COVID-19 in settings where AGPs are performed.

Tips for respirator facemasks:

1. The wearer must undertake a fit check each time a respirator is worn, to ensure there are no gaps between the mask and face for unfiltered air to enter;
2. Respirator masks can remain effective when worn continuously for extended periods of time, but must be changed if wet or damaged.

Powered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPRs)

A powered air purifying respirator (PAPR) encloses the entire head in a hood. Protection is provided against droplets (head is enclosed) and aerosols (air is pumped by a battery-powered pump through an appropriate filter into the hood). As the entire head is enclosed, a PAPR does not require a seal against the skin. The protection afforded is not reduced by facial hair. PAPRs are not generally used in Ireland and are not widely available.

There may be significant challenges in relation to their use. Staff training on safe use and cleaning and maintenance is required, in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, along with issues of user comfort.

Where a health care facility may need to use Powered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPRs), a checklist to support their use is available on the HPSC website:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/Checklist%20to%20support%20a%20health%20care%20facility%20using%20Powered%20Air%20Purifying%20Respirators.pdf>

Theatre caps/hoods and shoe covers

There is no evidence that contamination of hair is a significant route of transmission for SARS-2-CoV. Outside of surgical procedures involving high-speed drilling, where there may be a risk of splashing and extended coverage is desirable, (for example neurosurgery), head covers are not required and

are not recommended.

For a HCW with long hair, hair should be tied up and off their face when working in clinical settings.

Theatre shoe covers are not recommended outside of the operating theatre area.

Plastic/Perspex 'intubation boxes'

The use of plastic 'intubation boxes' is **not recommended**. If they are considered for use in a healthcare facility, the facility must perform a risk assessment and have a defined process for the use of this item of equipment and for the performance and tracing of decontamination of the item between each patient use. The policy should also address storage of these items when not in use.

Recommendations for the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during COVID-19 pandemic

For current guidance please see

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/pp/e/>

Donning PPE

Where to DON PPE

1. Don PPE in a designated area. This may be outside a room or a cohort area. If the entire ward is a cohort ward and extended use of PPE is adopted, then an area should be designated for this, at or near the entrance to the ward;
2. Adequate supplies of ABHR and PPE should be available and stored securely;
3. Placement of a mirror in the donning area should be considered, so a HCW can use the mirror to verify the integrity of their PPE and help to identify potential breaches in PPE, in the absence of a colleague being present to check;
4. PPE must be comfortable and secure before leaving the donning area;

Signage highlighting key steps in the donning sequence, including instructions how to undertake a fit check of a respirator mask, where its use is indicated, must be clearly displayed.

What to do before you put on your PPE

1. Remove all jewellery;

2. Remove mobile phones and pagers from pockets/belts and leave in a safe place;
3. Ensure you are well-hydrated and have availed of toilet facilities (in particular where prolonged patient care is anticipated);
4. Tie hair neatly back away from the face;
5. Perform hand hygiene.

Sequence of donning PPE

Videos on donning procedures are available on www.hpsc.ie

1. Put on disposable gown and secure with ties;
2. Put on surgical face mask, secure ties/straps to crown of the head. Fit flexible band to bridge of nose. Fit snug to face and below chin;
3. If ear loop masks are used fit flexible band to bridge of nose. Fit snug to face and pull the loops over the ear lobes;
4. Put on a respirator (FFP2) instead of surgical mask and fit check when indicated;
5. Please note this will require that the straps are placed to the middle back of head and neck
6. Put on eye protection (if required) – and adjust to fit;
7. Put on gloves – pull glove wrist over the gown cuff;
8. Double gloving is not appropriate in isolation rooms or cohort areas.

Doffing PPE

1. The procedure for removing PPE may vary across organisations, depending on the layout of the facility and availability of PPE;
2. The most important thing when removing PPE is to avoid self-contamination and to pay close attention to hand hygiene.

Where to doff PPE

1. Where a patient is in a **single room with an ante-room** all PPE should be removed and discarded in the ante-room;
2. When a patient is in a **single room with no ante-room**, remove gloves, gown and eye protection in the patient room. Do not remove the surgical facemask/respirator until outside the patient room;
3. Where patients with confirmed COVID-19 are being cared for in a **cohort area**, the location for doffing PPE will vary depending on the layout of individual facilities.

Sequence of doffing PPE

When all items can be discarded

1. Remove gloves and dispose in healthcare risk waste bin;

2. Perform hand hygiene;
3. Remove eye protection and dispose in healthcare risk waste bin;
4. Remove gown (avoid touching the front of the gown) and dispose in healthcare risk waste bin. (if hands become contaminated for example by touching the front of the gown during removal, perform hand hygiene)
5. Remove mask/respirator. Grasp and lift mask ties from behind your head and remove surgical facemask or respirator mask if worn, away from your face;
6. Alternatively, if ear loop face masks are worn, remove by grasping each loop on either side of the face beneath the ear lobes and gently pull the bands out and off the ear lobes away from your face;
7. Avoid touching the front of the mask or respirator and use ties to discard in healthcare risk waste bin;
8. Perform hand hygiene.

Duration of Transmission-based Precautions in Acute Hospital

People in the community with COVID-19 are now asked to self-isolate for **10 days from the date of onset of symptoms, with no fever for the last five days of that period.**

In the case of an asymptomatic COVID-19 infection in a person in the community (for example, a person, tested as a close contact of a case or as an outpatient prior to a scheduled procedure), the person should self-isolate for **10 days from the day the test was performed, with no fever for the last five days of that period.**

For hospitalised patients, the infectious period is generally 14 days from the date of onset of symptoms with no fever for the last five days of that period. This also applies to residents of long-term residential care facilities (LTRCF) and or patients who may intend to transfer to LTRCF. **The decision to lift Transmission-based precautions is a clinical decision in each case and should not happen by default based solely on the number of days elapsed since diagnosis.**

Where a patient is asymptomatic at the time of detection but subsequently develops symptoms attributed to COVID-19 the infectious period should be considered as 14 days from the date when symptoms commenced rather than from the date of detection. If no symptoms develop the infectious period is counted as 14 days from the date of detection.

In the context of the B 1.1.7 variant there are a number of recent clinical accounts within Ireland that suggest that people in the acute hospital settings may be a source of infection for others beyond the standard period of 14 days. Of particular concern are people who have had severe disease in multi-bed areas and who require ongoing respiratory support with high flow oxygen

systems or similar or have impaired immune function.

Repeat testing for SARS-CoV-2 at the end of the intended isolation period is generally not required. However repeat testing at the end of the intended isolation period may be appropriate in particular settings in view of recent experience.

Repeat testing should be considered in particular if the person has:

1. had severe illness;
2. is immunocompromised;
3. has ongoing respiratory symptoms that differ significantly from their baseline;
4. requires high flow oxygen or similar device for continuing respiratory support;
5. is being moved into a large multi-bed area;
6. If repeat testing is performed in that context result interpretation should take account of Ct value relative to the previous results on that patient. It is important to note that SARS-CoV-2 ribonucleic acid (RNA) remains detectable in respiratory secretions of some patients for extended periods (months in some cases). This does not equate to presence of viable virus.

However if repeat testing is performed under the circumstances outlined and the Ct values remains low extension of the period of isolation to 21 days may be appropriate.

Note some patients who meet the above criteria (14 days post onset with five days fever free) have a persistent cough. There is no evidence that such patients pose a specific infection risk or that transmission-based precautions need to be continued in all such cases. However, an extended period of contact and droplet precautions may be considered in some such cases if there is clinical concern and in particular if the patient is supported by a high flow oxygen device or similar. In such cases, the period of contact and droplet precautions should not be extended beyond 28 days.

Testing for SARS-CoV-2 RNA in an asymptomatic person who is fully or with COVID-19 diagnosed in the previous 9 months is generally not appropriate before scheduling treatment (surgery or other treatment). Exceptions to the above based on clinical judgment are appropriate in the acute hospital setting in particular when groups of people such as the following are in multi-bed areas:

1. those at very high risk of severe disease;
2. those with compromised immune function;
3. those with a continuing requirement for high flow oxygen or similar devices for respiratory support.

Persons who attend hospital for outpatient or inpatient care who have had laboratory-confirmed

COVID-19 do not generally require transmission-based precautions if the following criteria are met:

1. the infectious periods appropriate for their COVID-19 status has passed (10 days if not hospitalised and 14 days if hospitalised or resident in a LTRCF) and they have been fever free for the last five days of that period (note; if date of onset of symptoms is not clear or the patient had asymptomatic infection, use the date on which the sample for testing was taken);
2. there are no other indications for applying transmission-based precautions, for example they are not colonised with a multi-drug resistant organism.

Persons who attend hospital who are known to have had close contact with a laboratory-confirmed or clinically-suspected case of COVID-19 within the 14 days of exposure should be isolated (or physically separated from other patients if attending essential OPD/day services) and managed with transmission-based precautions, even if they are asymptomatic unless they are fully vaccinated or have had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months.

In general, persons who attend hospital who are known to have had close contact with a laboratory-confirmed or clinically-suspected case of COVID-19 do not require transmission-based precautions if the following criteria are met:

1. They have no symptoms of COVID-19 (this should be confirmed before attendance and again at reception);
2. 14 days have elapsed since their last exposure to the COVID-19 case;
3. There are no other known indications for applying transmission-based precautions, for example known to be colonised with multi-drug resistant organisms.

Aerosol Generating Procedures

Aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) are defined as medical and patient care procedures that result in increased risk of airborne transmission of infection of infections that may normally be transmissible primarily by the droplet route. A list of AGPs and recommended PPE is outlined at a link provided below.

1. Where an AGP that is consistently recognised or accepted by many as associated with an increased risk of infection is necessary on a patient with suspect or confirmed COVID-19, it should ideally be undertaken in a negative-pressure or neutral pressure room, using recommended airborne precautions.
2. If a negative/neutral pressure room is not available, an AGP that is consistently recognised or accepted by many as associated with an increased risk of infection should be undertaken using a process and environment that minimises the exposure risk for HCWs, ensuring that patients, visitors, and others in the healthcare setting are not exposed. For example, in a

single room, with ventilation to the greatest degree practical and the door kept closed, away from other patients and staff.

3. The risk associated with performing procedures categorised in Table 3 as “Plausible hypothesis- no evidence” outside of a negative pressure or neutral pressure room is low if performed by vaccinated staff with appropriate infection control precautions including use of appropriate PPE.
4. Essential personnel only should be present in a room/area where an AGP associated with increased risk of infection is being performed and those personnel should be fully vaccinated.
5. HCW and visitors should leave the patient’s room during an AGP, unless it is necessary for them to remain to undertake the AGP or to assist with the patient’s care during the AGP. Those present in the room during the AGP should be vaccinated and must wear the recommended PPE for an AGP situation for the duration of the procedure and for 20 minutes afterwards in rooms with mechanical ventilation and for up to one hour in a room with natural ventilation.
6. In critical care settings, where there is additional risk that an unanticipated AGP (e.g., due to accidental extubation or requirement for suctioning) may need to be performed urgently, it may be appropriate for all HCW present in the area to wear an FFP2 mask particularly if they are not fully vaccinated.

For the current list of aerosol generating procedures please see the following link:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/aerosolgeneratingprocedures/>

Cleaning an area after an AGP has been performed on a patient with suspected or confirmed COVID-19

1. Clearance of infectious particles after an AGP is performed will depend on the mechanical/natural ventilation and air changes per hour (ACH) within the room;
2. A single air change is estimated to remove 63% of airborne contaminants; after five air changes, less than 1% of airborne contamination remains;
3. In an isolation room with mechanical ventilation (10-12 ACH), it is advisable to wait for 20 minutes after the patient leaves following an AGP before entering the room to clean. A surgical face mask is not required if the patient is no longer in the room;
4. A room with no mechanical ventilation is likely to have fewer ACH (5-6). Therefore, it is advisable to leave the room for approximately one hour before cleaning after an AGP has been performed.

Ventilation

Airborne transmission of COVID-19 is an accepted risk in the context of AGPs associated with an increased risk of infection. Recent accounts from hospitals in Ireland since the dissemination of the B.1.1.7 variant have increased concern regarding the risk of airborne transmission in particular in the context of use of high flow oxygen devices (an aerosol generating procedure associated with increased risk of transmission). Airborne transmission may also be a factor in certain other circumstances. Transmission of COVID-19 has been associated with closed poorly ventilated spaces in which many people stay for long periods of time and SARS-CoV-2 can be detected in the air. A recent update from the European Centre for Disease Control provides a perspective on ventilation and air conditioning in the context of COVID-19 at the following link.

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/heating-ventilation-air-conditioning-systems-covid-19>

In the general clinical environment strict adherence to contact and droplet precautions is generally effective in managing the risk of transmission in the absence of AGPs. However while the significance of long-range (airborne) transmission remains unclear in other settings it is prudent to maximise ventilation to the greatest extent that is practical consistent with comfort and without introducing other potentially greater risks.

There is little or no clinical evidence that deployment of novel air cleaning methods in the healthcare environment effectively reduces the risk of transmission of COVID-19. In the absence of such evidence deployment of such systems is not generally recommended but may be a consideration in certain settings subject to risk assessment.

In this context the following is recommended:

1. In clinical areas where there is established mechanical ventilation that has been appropriately commissioned, meets current standards for the healthcare environment and is well maintained no modification of the operation of this system is required;
2. In areas where there is no mechanical ventilation it is appropriate to increase natural ventilation in clinical area by opening windows and doors in so far as practical and consistent with comfort of patients and staff; the goal is gentle air circulation rather than strong air currents;
3. In circumstances where entry of unfiltered external air is assessed as associated with a high risk for introduction of aspergillus spores into an environment where there are vulnerable patients the exclusion of aspergillus spores takes priority over increasing natural ventilation with a view to reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19;
4. If exhaust fans are used they must be installed so that the air is released directly outdoors. The number and technical specification of exhaust fans must take account of the size of the

room and the desired ventilation rate. Positioning the exhaust fan should be done so that it is not close to a ventilation air intake;

5. Installation of whirlybirds (for example whirligigs, wind turbines) may be useful to increase air flow in settings where they can be deployed;
6. When appropriately selected, deployed and maintained, single-space air cleaners with HEPA filters (either ceiling mounted or portable) can be effective in reducing/lowering concentrations of infectious aerosols in a single space however they have not been shown to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in a healthcare setting;
7. Some healthcare settings have found it helpful to use carbon dioxide (CO₂) monitors, mobile or fixed, to identify areas of poor ventilation and or to monitor ventilation.

Appendix 1 Preliminary Guidance on Facial Hair & Respiratory Protection in the healthcare setting in the context of COVID-19 and other pathogens transmitted by the same route

Background

Healthcare workers (HCWs) are at increased risk of exposure to a variety of respiratory hazards including transmissible respiratory diseases. One element of protecting HCWs against infectious respiratory hazards is the effective use of specific items of personal protective equipment (PPE). Surgical face masks and respirator masks are the most commonly used types of PPE in this context.

1. Surgical masks

Surgical masks are intended to protect the wearer against the mucosa of the nose and mouth and most of the surrounding skin from impact of respiratory droplets originating from the respiratory tract of the patient. They are also intended to protect the patient from exposure to potentially infectious droplets from the healthcare worker. The degree of protection afforded is related to the properties of the mask and how it is applied in particular the fit of the mask to the face. Facial hair that is sufficient to prevent the mask from fitting flush against the skin of the face may result in reduced protection against droplet impact.

2. Respirators

In this context, respirators are intended to provide protection from infectious agents spread by the airborne route (small aerosols) including aerosols generated during Aerosol Generating Procedures associated with an increased risk of infection (AGPs). There are two types:

(a) Respirator masks (flat or cone shaped, FFP2 or FFP3)

These are disposable masks and are intended to protect the wearer against inhalation of infectious aerosols in addition to protection against droplet impact. The degree of protection afforded is related to the properties of the mask and how it is applied, in particular the fit of the mask to the face. The filtration of aerosols is entirely dependent on forcing inhaled air to pass through the fabric of the mask. This works if the seal of the mask against the face prevents air circumventing the mask. Respirator masks that do not fit flush because of facial hair along the sealing area of the respirator cannot be considered as providing adequate protection against exposure to aerosols.

Fit testing of respirator masks and the fit checking of the mask each time used is required to ensure that the mask fits properly to the wearers face shape, with no gaps between the mask and face for air to escape unfiltered. The Health and Safety Authority indicate that where a risk assessment indicates that healthcare workers need to use a close-fitting respirator mask for their protection that every effort should be made to comply with the requirement for fit testing of the workers, as

far as is reasonably practicable. When fit testing of all staff is not immediately possible, then fit testing should be prioritised for those at greatest risk.

(b) Powered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPRs)

PAPRs enclose the entire head in a hood. Protection is provided against droplets (head is enclosed) and aerosols (air is pumped by a battery-powered pump through an appropriate filter into the hood). As the entire head is enclosed, PAPRs do not require a seal against the skin. The protection afforded is not reduced by facial hair. PAPRs are not generally used and are not widely available. There may be significant challenges in relation to use of PAPRs. They may not be easy to source, costs are significant, staff need to be trained in their use, they must be cleaned and decontaminated according to the manufacturer's instructions and there can be issues of user comfort.

Options for management

There is no one solution that will work for every facility and for every healthcare worker. **Note that vaccination is effective against infection transmitted by all routes and is an important part of managing this risk where applicable but vaccination does not eliminate the requirement for respiratory protection in many settings.** The options for healthcare workers with facial hair that prevents a surgical mask or respiratory mask from fitting flush against the skin are as follows:

1. Remove facial hair that interferes with the fit of the mask flush against the skin. This is the most practical way to ensure that staff can benefit fully from protection provided by surgical masks and properly fitted respirator masks.
2. For healthcare workers for whom removal of facial hair that interferes with the fit of the mask flush against the skin is not an acceptable option
 - a. surgical masks are likely to provide useful protection against droplet transmitted infection but this may be at a reduced level.
 - b. respirator masks cannot be expected to work effectively
3. Risk management options include
 - a. Consider if they can be assigned duties that do not involve direct care for patients for whom aerosol precautions are required.
4. Wear a PAPR when caring for patients for whom airborne precautions are required.

Notes:

1. This note relates only to use of respiratory protection related to infectious disease. Exposure to other hazardous substances is beyond the scope of this document.
2. For an illustration of facial hairstyles that may impact on the function of respirator masks see <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2017/11/02/noshave/>

Appendix 2 Admissions, transfers and discharges to and from residential care facilities

Note regarding testing and restricting movement of People Pre-transfer/Admission to a LTRCF

The requirement for testing before transfer or admission does not normally apply to people who are fully vaccinated or who have had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months. However, it may be required in some people based on risk assessment (for example people with impaired immune function).

In the context of a LTRCF with a high level of vaccine protection there is no requirement to limit the movement of a resident within the LTRCF after return from an outing or hospital attendance regardless of the duration of the absence unless some significant and unanticipated exposure risk occurred or there is a specific public health or IPC recommendation that requires limitation of movement.

In the absence of a high level of vaccination non-vaccinated residents absent from the LTRCF for more than 12 hours should be advised to limit their contact with other residents. Such non-vaccinated residents should be offered testing between day 5 and day 7 after their return and if they test not-detected and are asymptomatic they may return to normal activities at that time. For those who are fully vaccinated in such a LTRCF there is no requirement to limit the movement after return from an outing or hospital attendance regardless of the duration of the absence unless some significant and unanticipated exposure risk occurred or there is a specific public health or IPC recommendation that requires limitation of movement.

Introduction

Long-term residential care facilities (LTRCF) are a critical part of health and social care services. LTRCFs should put in place clear processes that facilitate the return of residents from an acute setting and the admission of new residents, where it is clinically safe to do so.

It is recognised that accepting admission or transfer of residents poses a risk of introducing COVID-19, even where processes to manage the risks are in place however it is essential that this risk is balanced against the consequences of restricting access to a facility/service or disproportionately impacting on the wellbeing of residents. The risk of harm from introduction of COVID-19 is greatly reduced when residents and staff who are fully vaccinated.

Residents transferring to a LTRCF from an acute hospital should generally have had the first dose of vaccine before transfer. While the vaccine should ideally be administered as long as possible in advance of transfer, there is no requirement to delay transfer of a person who is otherwise ready for discharge to allow time for an immune response to the vaccine. Arrangements to complete the vaccination in the LTRCF are essential.

In all instances, careful attention to standard precautions will assist in minimising risk of infection to residents and staff. Key elements include; hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, use of personal protective equipment (PPE), for example wearing disposable gloves when in contact with blood or other body fluids (other than sweat), non-intact skin or mucus membranes and regular environmental cleaning.

It is essential that residents and clients and their significant persons are informed of the issues and risks of decisions related to their care and that their preferences are taken into account in applying this guidance.

Background on testing for COVID-19

The key point about testing is that interpretation is not straightforward

- 1. A test result that says not-detected or “negative” does not prove the person is not infectious to others**
- 2. A test result that says a virus is detected does not prove the person is still infectious to others**

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been significant learning about the role of testing for COVID-19 and its role in determining levels of asymptomatic infection and tracking spread of infection, especially in congregated settings, such as LTRCF.

A single test may be reported as not-detected or “negative” in a substantial proportion of people with infection. The test is more likely to miss infection in people with pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic infection. Therefore, a not-detected or “negative” test makes COVID-19 infection less likely, but it does not prove the person is not infected.

Equally, for those who have been infected and infectious with COVID 19, a continued positive test result does not mean they are still infectious to others. Some people have a positive test for weeks after onset of symptoms, but latest evidence shows they are very unlikely to spread infection. **For people with a diagnosis of COVID-19 infection who are in a RCF or are planning to move into a RCF, the period of isolation is 14 days after onset of symptoms with no fever for the last five of this period.**

Note that if a person is detected by testing and subsequently develops symptoms the 14 days is counted from the date of symptom onset (not the sample date); however if they do not develop symptoms the 14 days is counted from the sample date.

The period of 14 days continues to apply in this setting although the infectious period is now 10 days with no fever for the last 5 days for people who do not require hospitalisation for care of COVID-19 and who are not resident in LTRCF. Note that repeat testing at the end of the isolation period is generally not appropriate though exceptions may arise in the context of discussion with Microbiology, Infectious Diseases or Public Health Clinicians.

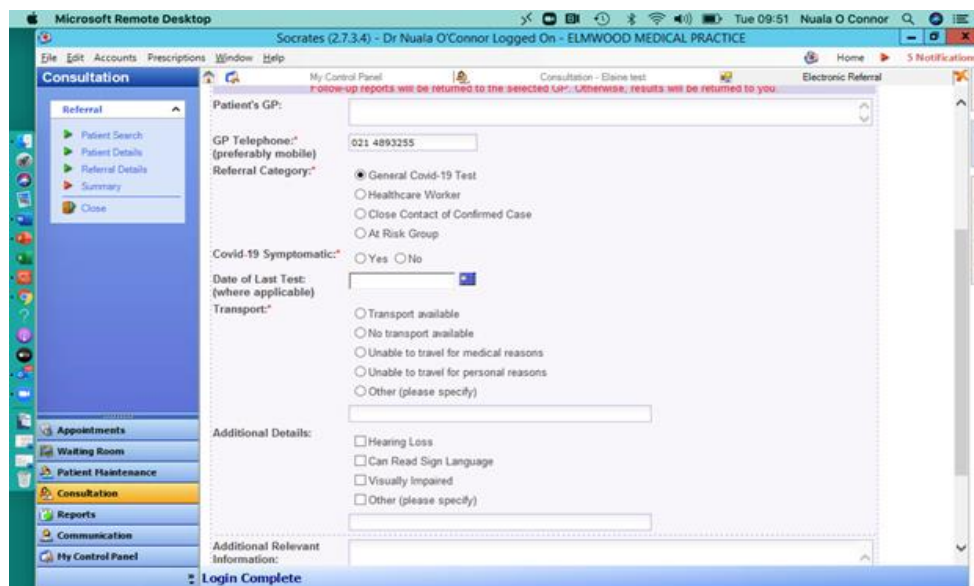
The role of COVID-19 testing in assisting with decision-making regarding transfers to congregated settings

1. People for admission to a LTRCF should be tested for SARS-CoV-2 unless the exclusions at 5, 6 and 7 apply. This applies to transfer from a hospital or another LTRCF or to people admitted from the community. This is to help identify most of those who have infection, but it will not detect all of those with infection.
2. Testing, if required, should be performed within three days of planned admission to the LTRCF if transfer is from a hospital or another LTRCF and should also be performed whenever possible for admissions from the community.
3. Where testing is required and is not performed before admission, it should be carried out within one day of admission.
4. Irrespective of testing, all residents should be assessed before admission to ensure they are not known COVID-19 contacts and have no clinical symptoms suggestive of COVID-19.
5. The requirement for testing in advance of transfer or admission does not apply to people who are fully vaccinated or who have had confirmed COVID-19 in the previous 9 months, and who are no longer considered infectious to others (minimum 14 days since onset of symptoms and no fever for the last five days).
6. The requirement for testing in advance of transfer or admission does not apply to settings caring for children under the age of 18
7. The requirement for testing in advance of transfer or admission does not apply to people who are returning to supported/assisted living or small group homes (generally less than five residents) following discharge from hospital, where the facility is more reflective of a household setting
8. For patients or residents who decline or are clearly distressed by collection of a nasopharyngeal sample a deep nasal sample (also known as a mid-turbinate swab) is often less uncomfortable. Deep nasals swabs should generally be used for surveillance testing on people who require very frequent testing and for those in whom a nasopharyngeal sample collection is difficult or distressing. An anterior nasal swab is NOT a suitable sample. Some residents may decline testing, or may find the process too distressing and that testing may not be appropriate in every situation (Refer to DOH [Guidance](#) on Ethical Considerations Relating to Long-Term Residential Care Facilities in the context of COVID-19).

Procedure for Testing of People Pre-transfer/Admission to a LTRCF

Note that testing is not normally required for people who are fully vaccinated or who have had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months although it may be required in some people based on risk assessment (for example people with impaired immune function). In this circumstance testing and restriction of movement after transfer is generally not required.

1. If a person is being transferred from an acute hospital to a LTRCF and if testing is required, the hospital should arrange for the person to be swabbed in the three days before transfer.
2. If a person is being admitted to the LTRCF from home and if testing is required, where possible, the GP should arrange for the person to be swabbed within the three days before admission. This can be done using Healthlink. If the person cannot travel to the test centre, a home test can be ordered by clicking on the 'no transport available' option as shown on the screenshot below (Figure 1).
3. If a test pre-admission is required but cannot be arranged, including for urgent admissions, the person should be admitted as planned. The person will need to be isolated, with full contact and droplet precautions until the result of the test is available. The facility can arrange swabbing after admission. This can be done by the person's own GP or the GP/Medical Officer who provides medical care for the residents in the facility. If the sample is reported not detected, the precautions that apply are those that apply to a person with sample reported not-detected before admission (see below).



The screenshot shows a Microsoft Remote Desktop window displaying the Healthlink web application. The browser title is 'Socrates (2.7.3.4) - Dr Nuala O'Connor Logged On - ELMWOOD MEDICAL PRACTICE'. The page is titled 'Consultation - Elaine test' and shows a form for a COVID-19 test referral. The form includes the following fields and options:

- Patient's GP: [Text input field]
- GP Telephone: (preferably mobile): 021 4893255
- Referral Category: General Covid-19 Test, Healthcare Worker, Close Contact of Confirmed Case, At Risk Group
- Covid-19 Symptomatic: Yes, No
- Date of Last Test: (where applicable): [Date picker]
- Transport: Transport available, No transport available, Unable to travel for medical reasons, Unable to travel for personal reasons, Other (please specify)
- Additional Details: Hearing Loss, Can Read Sign Language, Visually Impaired, Other (please specify)
- Additional Relevant Information: [Text input field]

Figure 1. Snapshot of Health link web page

Requirements for placement and restricted movement of the person as part of transfer protocols Planning

1. All LTRCF should review their accommodation to identify areas where new residents can safely restrict their movement. It is understood that the creation of such areas may be constrained by existing accommodation availability (e.g., rooms already in use by existing residents).
2. Where possible the use of single rooms in LTRCF with significant numbers of multi-occupancy rooms should be prioritised for new transfers and admissions from community or other healthcare facilities (acute hospital or other LTRCF), regardless of the pre-admission COVID-19 test result.
3. For those LTRCF providing a blend of longer-term nursing home and short-term respite or convalescence care, it is advised to consider where the longer and shorter-term residents will be accommodated and where it is feasible, to try and place residents for shorter-term accommodation in an area separate to those for longer-term accommodation.
4. The identification of space for the 14-day period of restricted movement needs to be managed carefully with residents, families and others. Existing residents should not be required to move from their room / accommodation in order to facilitate the creation of new areas to facilitate transfers.
5. Careful consideration should also be given to the consequences of closing facilities/rooms within a service for the purpose of having an isolation area should a need arise – the potential harms of such decisions should be balanced against the likely requirement.
6. All transfers or new admissions should have a risk assessment, to ensure sufficient resources are available within the LTRCF to support physical distancing and placement of residents.
7. Any person who does is not are fully vaccinated and has not been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the previous 9 months will need to restrict their movements for 14 days after transfer regardless of the test result.
8. If the person is fully vaccinated or if the person has had COVID-19 in the past 9 months they do not need either testing or to restrict their movement after transfer.
9. For those who require restricted movement the following applies:
10. Care delivered within the single room of a person on restricted movement can be delivered with Standard Precautions plus surgical mask and the resident may leave their room as per guidance below on transfers.
11. The resident is not required to remain in strict isolation, but should practice restricted movement:
12. The resident may leave their room, but should remain separated from other residents (e.g. to go the garden or for a short walk)
13. A move to a multi-occupancy room (where this is the planned accommodation in the longer term for the resident) will be appropriate after the 14-day period, once the resident is symptom free and there is no evidence of infection in residents within the room it is proposed for the resident to move to.

Transfer of people with COVID-19

1. Any resident transferred to a LTRCF before the 14 days have elapsed since date of onset of symptoms or date of first positive test (if symptom onset undetermined/asymptomatic), must be isolated with transmission-based precautions up to day 14 on return to the LTRCF. Such transfer should not proceed if the receiving LTRCF has no other residents with infectious COVID-19 at the time. Provided the resident has remained afebrile for the last five of the 14 days, the resident is generally no longer infectious to others after day 14 has elapsed. However if the hospital practice requires repeat testing or extended isolation for the patient for a specific reason the same level caution applies in advance of transfer to the LTRCF.
2. In particular, existing residents from a LTRCF who require transfer to hospital from the LTRCF for assessment or care related to COVID-19 acquired in the LTRCF should be allowed to transfer back to that LTRCF following assessment / admission, if clinically fit for discharge and risk assessment with the facility determines there is capacity for them to be cared for there, with appropriate isolation and where that transfer represents the most appropriate place of care for the resident (e.g. ongoing need for palliative care).
3. If the resident in an LTRCF has been diagnosed with COVID-19 while in hospital, it is important to assess if the person was infected in the LTRCF before transfer to the hospital or if this is a hospital-acquired infection. If it is likely that infection was acquired in hospital and there are no other known cases of COVID-19 in the LTRCF, transfer back to the LTRCF should be delayed until the resident is no longer infectious to others.
4. The public health team should be notified immediately where newly-diagnosed COVID-19 is assessed as acquired within a LTRCF.
5. In all instances the discharging hospital should provide the LTRCF with the following information on the arrival of the resident:
 - a. The date and results of COVID-19 tests (including dates of tests reported as not-detected)
 - b. The date of onset of any symptoms of COVID-19
 - c. Date of last documented fever while in hospital (particularly important where resident is being transferred to RCF within 14 days of COVID-19 diagnosis)
 - d. Details of any follow-up treatment or monitoring require

Residents who become symptomatic during admission to the LTRCF

1. Following transfer/admission to a LTRCF, the resident should be evaluated by their doctor if they become symptomatic, including changes in the resident's overall clinical condition and a further viral swab for SARS-CoV-2 sent for testing.
2. The rationale for this recommendation is that, in the context of a pandemic, there may have been contact between the resident and HCW or other people who may have had COVID-19

infection, but who may have been in the pre-symptomatic incubation period or have had minimal symptoms/been asymptomatic at the time. In that case, there would be an associated risk of unrecognised onward transmission to the resident.

Cessation of new admissions to a facility during an outbreak of COVID-19 in a LTRCF

1. Following the declaration of an outbreak within a LTRCF, admissions of new residents to the facility (i.e. residents not previously living in the LTRCF) should be suspended until Public Health state that the outbreak is over.
2. Residents normally cared for in the LTRCF who are admitted to hospital while an outbreak is ongoing in the LTRCF may have their discharge to the same LTRCF facilitated if it is deemed to be clinically appropriate and a risk assessment has been carried out which identifies that the resident can be isolated and the facility has capacity to manage their care needs and where that transfer represents the most appropriate place of care for the resident (e.g. ongoing need for palliative care).

Transfers from LTRCF to an acute hospital

1. COVID-19 positive status must not significantly delay transfer to an acute hospital, where it is deemed clinically appropriate. The national ambulance service (NAS) and the local receiving hospital must be informed by the LTRCF, in advance of transfer of any COVID-19 positive or suspected COVID-19 resident AND where there is a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 outbreak in the LTRCF.
2. People with COVID-19 do not require to be hospitalised for the 14 days if they are clinically fit for discharge, if infection was acquired in the LTRCF or if the LTRCF already has cases of COVID-19 and the LTRCF has appropriate facilities and capacity for isolation and can support care.
3. Residents do not require isolation on return to their LTRCF following hospital transfer to facilitate short investigations (e.g., diagnostics, haemodialysis, radiology, outpatient appointment).
4. Residents who are not fully vaccinated and have not had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months and are absent from the LTRCF for more than 12 hours should be advised to limit their contact with other residents on their return. Such non-vaccine protected residents and those who have not had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months should be offered testing between day 5 and day 7 after their return and if they test not-detected and are asymptomatic they may return to normal activities at that time.
5. Residents who are not fully vaccinated or who have had COVID-19 in the previous 9 months will not need either testing or to restrict their movements on return to their LTRCF from an outing or hospital attendance regardless of the duration of the absence unless some

significant and unanticipated exposure risk occurred or there is a specific public health or IPC recommendation that requires limitation of movement.

Table Transfer/admission of a resident to a LTRCF

| CLINICAL SCENARIO | RECOMMENDED PRECAUTIONS ON ARRIVAL TO LTRCF | PRE-ADMISSION TEST FOR SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) | TIMING OF TRANSFER TO LTRCF | DAY OF TRANSFER |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| <p>CONFIRMED COVID-19 & will be still infectious to others on planned date of transfer (less than 14 days since onset/test date)</p> | <p>Transmission-based Precautions until 14 days reached and has been afebrile for last five of those days</p> | <p>Not required, as already confirmed COVID-19</p> | <p>LTRCF has other resident(s) with COVID-19: Transfer when fit for discharge to LTRCF AND provided LTRCF can meet care needs</p> <p>LTRCF has no other resident with COVID-19 - Remain in hospital until no longer infectious to others</p> | <p>Confirm date of onset/first positive test result</p> <p>Confirm date last febrile</p> |
| <p>CONFIRMED COVID-19 in past 9 months & no longer infectious to others (more than 14 days since onset/test date and afebrile for last five of those days)</p> | <p>No requirement for Transmission based Precautions or restricted movement</p> | <p>Not required, as already confirmed COVID-19</p> | <p>When fit for discharge to LTRCF</p> | <p>Confirm date of onset/first positive test result is more than 14 days ago and was afebrile for last five days of that</p> |
| <p>Fully vaccinated against COVID-19</p> | <p>No requirement for Transmission based Precautions or restricted movement</p> | <p>No requirement for test within the 3 days prior to scheduled transfer date</p> | <p>When fit for discharge to LTRCF</p> | <p>Confirm details of vaccination</p> |
| <p>NO PRIOR CONFIRMATION OF COVID-19 or COVID-19 MORE THAN nine months previously & test result available before transfer</p> | <p>Single room accommodation with monitoring for symptoms until 14 days reached. Standard Precautions plus surgical face mask. Restrict-movement</p> | <p>Test within the 3 days prior to scheduled transfer date</p> | <p>Test result- not-detected LTRCF can meet care needs</p> | <p>Confirm test result received</p> <p>Ensure no new symptoms and not newly-identified as a contact of a COVID-19 case</p> |
| <p>NO PRIOR CONFIRMATION OF COVID-19 or COVID-19 MORE THAN nine months previously & test result available before transfer But Test result is NOT available prior to admission</p> | <p>Transmission-based Precautions until test result is available then follow as per immediately above</p> | <p>Test within one day of admission</p> | <p>When fit for discharge to LTRCF</p> | <p>Take sample for COVID-19 test. Ensure no symptoms and not newly identified contact of a COVID-19 case</p> |

Appendix 3 Respiratory/Cough Etiquette

COVER UP

COUGHING AND SNEEZING

- 
 - Turn your head away from others
 - Use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth
- 
 - Drop your tissue into a waste bin
- 
 - No tissues? Use your sleeve
- 
 - Clean your hands after discarding tissue using soap and water or alcohol gel for at least 15 seconds



These steps will help prevent the spread of colds, flu and other respiratory infections

Appendix 4 Healthcare Risk Waste

| RISK WASTE | RISK WASTE | RISK WASTE |
|---|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">YELLOW BAG</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">YELLOW SHARPS BIN (with blue or red lid)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">YELLOW 30/60 LITRE RIGID BIN (with yellow lid)</p> |
| <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All blood-stained items and all items soiled with body fluids assessed as infectious • Suction catheters & tubing • Incontinence waste from known or suspected enteric infections • Bag should be closed using 'swan neck' when 2/3 full <p>* NO SHARPS, LIQUIDS OR HARD OBJECTS</p> | <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="margin-top: 20px;">  </div> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Needles • All Syringes • Scalpels • Contaminated slides • Sharps tips of clear IV giving sets • Blood-stained or contaminated glass • Stitch cutters • Guide wires/ trocars • Razors <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>NOTE: Use Long Bin for large trocars, knives, stapling guns, etc.</p> </div> <p>* NO FREE LIQUIDS</p> | <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blood Administration Sets (never disconnect line from bag) • Contained blood and body fluids • Non-cultured laboratory waste (including autoclaved microbiological cultures) • Disposable suction liners • Redivac drains (ensure drain closure sealed) • Sputum containers • Chest drains <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>NOTE: Absorbent material or gelling agent should be used in sufficient quantities to hold the fluid and prevent leakage.</p> </div> <p>* NO SHARPS OR FREE LIQUIDS</p> |