



April 11, 2020

To: Health system partners

From: Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health

Re: Optimizing the Supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the COVID-19 Pandemic

As you know, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic is causing shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) around the world. Here in Ontario, we continue to address increases in COVID-19 cases and prepare for a surge that we know could strain, and possibly even outstrip, our supply chain capacity.

Likewise, many of you have already started various conservation efforts. To support your efforts, the attached is from our Ontario Health *COVID-19 Response: Personal Protective Equipment Committee*, chaired by Dr. Chris Simpson, Vice-Dean (Clinical), School of Medicine, Queen's University. That committee, which includes expertise from leaders in infection control, infectious diseases, occupational health and safety, primary care, long-term care, home and community care, acute care, emergency medicine, biomedical engineering, and nanotechnology engineering, has developed evidence-based recommendations for approaches and actions should we be faced with a severe shortage of PPE.

The recommendations cover:

- Reusable PPE
- Extended use and limited reuse of PPE
- Use of expired PPE
- High level principles related to reprocessing PPE following Health Canada's recent notice to industry
- Alternate sources of PPE

To be clear, Ontario Health is supporting the investigation and preparation of these paths, however not recommending using these alternatives in clinical settings at this time. This is all about planning and preparing for an eventuality we all hope never arrives. We are sharing these recommendations to support the conversations you are having. We also strongly encourage that you work with your Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committees locally as you review these recommendations.

The decision to move forward with using PPE through one of the alternative methods should be a collective one and not one made by an individual hospital or health care organization. Additionally, we encourage comprehensive documentation on any processes and key dates of any re-processed or stored materials should any re-use or alternatives be needed in the future.

Please find attached the recommendations from the *COVID-19 Response: Personal Protective Equipment Committee*. We suggest reviewing these now, while the supply chain is holding, rather than be unprepared in the event that supplies begin to run low. Everything we are recommending is informed by science and motivated by a deep commitment to safety, which will always be the case.

Regards,

Matthew Anderson



Optimizing the Supply of Personal Protective Equipment During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Recommendations from Ontario Health

Release date: April 11, 2020

Optimizing the Supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the COVID-19 Pandemic

This document was developed by the *COVID-19 Response: Personal Protective Equipment Committee*, a committee convened to respond to urgent issues surrounding personal protective equipment during the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Chaired by Dr. Chris Simpson, the committee includes expertise from health system leaders in infection prevention and control (IPAC), infectious diseases, occupational health and safety, primary care, long-term care, home and community care, acute care, emergency medicine, and engineering. See Appendix A for the full list of committee members.

The recommendations provided in this document ensure the responsible stewardship of PPE and contingency planning for any anticipated surge in COVID-19 cases, when supplies may be running low or are depleted. The recommendations in this document will support health care organizations and health care workers to make evidence-based decisions for optimizing their supply of PPE and ensuring the safety and protection of health care workers.

Included are recommendations for the following strategies to optimize the supply of PPE during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- 1. Recommendations on procuring PPE**
 - Reusable PPE options
 - Other sources of certified PPE
 - 3D-printed face shields
- 2. Recommendations for the extended use of PPE**
- 3. Recommendations for the use of expired PPE**
- 4. Recommendations for the limited reuse of PPE**
- 5. Information for use of non-NIOSH certified PPE**
- 6. Recommendations for sterilization and decontamination methods for reprocessing PPE**
- 7. Recommendations for alternative innovation products**

While this document addresses specific aspects of PPE reuse and reprocessing, appropriate stewardship of PPE remains very important. Health care workers should follow droplet/contact precautions (surgical/procedure mask, gown, gloves, and eye protection) when caring for individuals with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. Health care workers should use an N95 respirator during aerosol-generation medical procedures (AGMP) performed on suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients.

In this document, *personal protective equipment (PPE)* refers to respirators, surgical/procedure masks, isolation gowns, gloves, and eye protection (goggles and face shields). See Appendix B for a glossary of terms. See Appendix C for a summary table of ways to conserve existing supply of PPE.

There are many factors that need to be considered before a health care worker uses PPE, such as administrative and engineering controls (e.g., the use of physical barriers, the use of telemedicine where appropriate, restricting visitors, cohorting patients with COVID-19).¹⁻⁴ Personal protective equipment is the last line of defense, and as such, to effectively control for the risk of contracting infections in the workplace, the hierarchy of controls needs to be incorporated into decision-making. Health care organizations must always ensure compliance with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and with the

Health Care and Residential Facilities Regulation under the Act. Their responsibilities include establishing policies, procedures, measures, and training for the protection of workers in consultation with their Joint Health and Safety Committee or Health and Safety representative. In addition, health care workers must be instructed and trained in the care, use, and limitations of PPE before wearing or using it for the first time and at regular intervals thereafter and the worker must participate in such instruction and training.

This document is a living document and includes recommendations supported by current available evidence. As this topic area and evidence evolves, the committee will continue to evaluate innovations in a timely way and update this document accordingly. For a supplemental information, see appendices D to H.

Recommendations for Health Care Organizations

Please consider the following conservation strategies to extend the supply of PPE and to ensure the long-term sustainability of PPE during the COVID-19 pandemic. This page provides an overview of the key items—more information is provided in their respective sections.

- **To help extend the supply of PPE, switch to reusable PPE options wherever they can be safely implemented:**
 - Collaborate with your organization's occupational health and safety, IPAC and infectious disease specialists to develop appropriate protocols for the use of reusable elastomeric respirators, which are a reusable equivalent to the more commonly known disposable N95 respirator. Organizations without these key specialist groups should consider consulting with experts from their region
 - Consider the use of powered air purifying respirators (PAPRs) in certain situations where health care workers will be wearing protective equipment for prolonged periods of time and where appropriate training can be provided (e.g., in the intensive care unit)
 - Establish procedures for fit-testing (where required) and cleaning/disinfecting and provide education and training resources for health care workers on safe use of reusable PPE options. If an employee presents with their own reusable respirator, occupational health and safety units need to be engaged in order to support safe usage
 - We support the efforts to initiate acquisition of reusable PPE options as a sustainable contingency approach
- **Use certified PPE from other medical settings and non-medical settings:** Obtain and use certified PPE products from other medical settings that no longer need them and certified products from commercial, non-medical settings (e.g., industry-related settings). This includes disposable and reusable N95 respirators and other types of National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) certifications that provide protection from the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which includes: N99, N100, R95, R99, R100, P95, P99, P100.
- **Use 3D-printed face shields for eye protection, if needed:** 3D-printed face shields are an appropriate alternative to traditional face shields for eye protection. Ensure they meet the standards⁵ set out by Health Canada
- **Extend the use of existing PPE:** Ensure that health care workers caring for cohorted patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 are following extended-use recommendations as appropriate for their setting
- **Use of expired products:** Take stock and inspect any expired N95 respirators (disposable)⁶ and any other stock of expired PPE
 - Expired N95 respirators (disposable) and other PPE that have been stored in accordance with manufacturers' storage conditions require inspection to ensure they are not damaged and may be used when regular supplies are depleted
- **Limited reuse:** Ensure that health care workers are following limited-reuse recommendations as appropriate for their setting

- **Take caution when using non-NIOSH certified PPE:** Verify the authenticity of and fit test any PPE products that may not meet NIOSH certification

- **Collect and store used N95 respirators (disposable) for reprocessing with sterilization and decontamination methods:**
 - Where feasible, all health care organizations should begin collecting used N95 respirators (disposable) that are not visibly soiled or damaged so that they may be reprocessed for future use using appropriate sterilization and decontamination methods
 - Used N95 respirators (disposable) that are unsoiled and undamaged should be collected and stored in disposal receptacles that are clearly labelled, dated, and separated from other types of PPE (e.g., in a biohazard bag, paper bag, or box). Collect N95 respirators separately from surgical/procedure masks. Consider the feasibility of additional individual tracking needs, as health care workers may prefer to reuse their own masks. Ensure the condition of the N95 respirators are suitable for reprocessing if they have been stored for a period of time
 - If a validated process for disinfecting/reprocessing is feasible at your health care organization, move forward with developing an implementation plan

- **Collect and store used surgical/procedure masks:**
 - Wherever feasible, all health care organizations should begin collecting used surgical/procedure masks (that are not visibly soiled or damaged) and store in clearly labelled and dated disposal receptacles and separated from other types of PPE (e.g., in a biohazard bag, paper bag, or box). Collect surgical/procedure masks separately from N95 respirators.
 - Although there is currently no clear evidence supporting a validated sterilization and decontamination method for reprocessing surgical/procedure masks, we recognize that the evidence on sterilization and decontamination methods is rapidly evolving; therefore, we recommend collecting and safely storing used surgical/procedure masks for potential reprocessing in the future

- **3D-printed face masks/respirators and fabric/cloth masks:** 3D-printed face masks/respirators and fabric/cloth masks are NOT recommended for use by health care workers

1. Recommendations on Procuring Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

In the context of depleted supplies of PPE during a pandemic and in an effort to maintain the long-term sustainability of PPE, shifting from disposable PPE to reusable PPE options should be considered in your contingency plans.

Recommendations for health care organizations

- To help extend the supply of PPE, switch to reusable PPE options wherever they can be safely implemented:
 - Collaborate with your organization's occupational health and safety, IPAC and infectious disease specialists to develop appropriate protocols for the use of reusable elastomeric respirators, which are a reusable equivalent to the more commonly known disposable N95 respirator. Organizations without these key specialist groups should consider consulting with experts from their region
 - Consider the use of powered air purifying respirators (PAPRs) in certain situations where health care workers will be wearing protective equipment for prolonged periods of time and where appropriate training can be provided (e.g., in the intensive care unit)
 - Establish procedures for fit-testing (where required) and cleaning/disinfecting and provide education and training resources for health care workers on safe use of reusable PPE options. If an employee presents with their own reusable respirator, occupational health and safety units need to be engaged in order to support safe usage
 - We support the efforts to initiate acquisition of reusable PPE options as a sustainable contingency approach

- Use certified PPE from other medical settings and non-medical settings:
 - Obtain and use certified PPE products from other medical settings that no longer need them and certified products from commercial, non-medical settings (e.g., industry-related settings). This includes disposable and reusable N95 respirators and other types of National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) certifications that provide protection from the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which includes: N99, N100, R95, R99, R100, P95, P99, P100.

- Use 3D-printed face shields for eye protection, if needed:
 - 3D-printed face shields are an appropriate alternative to traditional face shields for eye protection
 - Ensure they meet the standards⁵ set out by Health Canada

A. Use Reusable PPE Options

As described in Table 1 (below), the following PPE are reusable: elastomeric respirators, cloth isolation gowns, reusable eye protection (goggles and face shields), and PAPRs.

Reusable refers to the ability for a product to be used repeatedly, with validated methods for cleaning and/or disinfection between uses

Table 1. Types of PPE with reusable options	
Type of PPE	Description
N95 respirator equivalent: Reusable elastomeric respirators (half-mask and full facepiece)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recommend switching to reusable elastomeric respirators, wherever possible. If fit-tested and properly cleaned and disinfected between uses, reusable elastomeric respirators (half-mask or full facepiece) are as effective as disposable N95 respirators Reusable elastomeric respirators differ from disposable N95 respirators in that some users may experience issues with comfort/bulkiness, interference with communication, and some people may feel claustrophobia or anxiety Use of this type of reusable respirator needs the support from local administrative/occupation health and safety teams to ensure fit-testing and to support standardized cleaning protocols. If an employee presents with their own respirator, occupational health and safety units needs to be engaged to support safe usage The ideal way to disinfect these respirators is to submerge them in water and bleach. However, the use of water and bleach is not practical between patients. As an interim option, the exterior surface can be cleaned using organization-approved disinfectant wipes (alcohol, quaternary ammonia, hydrogen peroxide, or bleach).⁷ Refer to the manufacturer’s instructions on cleaning and disinfection Pay special attention to the appropriate handling and reuse of potentially contaminated detachable filters. Some detachable filters have exposed fibers that present a self-contamination hazard; this type of filter is not recommended unless it can be safely discarded. Do not get the cartridges and filters wet. The attached filtering cartridges are replaceable and can be changed. Currently these filters cannot be reprocessed <p><i>Sources of additional information: 3M Cleaning and Disinfecting Technical Bulletin,⁸ 3M Replacement and Cleaning Training Video,⁹ Standard Operating Procedure for Disinfection,¹⁰ Health Canada List of Disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2¹¹, Lawrence et al., 2017.¹²</i></p>
Isolation gowns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Switch to reusable isolation gown options, wherever possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cloth isolation gowns or surgical gowns

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reusable waterproof gowns
Eye protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Switch to reusable eye protection options, wherever possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reusable goggles ○ Reusable face shields
N95 respirator equivalent: powered air purifying respirators (PAPRs) ¹³⁻¹⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PAPRs provide equivalent protection to other established methods of protection for airborne hazards (note that PAPRs should not be considered a superior option to N95 respirators). PAPRs require careful doffing and complicated cleaning steps. PAPRs do not require fit testing and can be worn with facial hair ● PAPRs are a viable reusable option in specific circumstances, where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appropriate training is provided ○ They are used consistently by trained staff ○ Staff provide prolonged continuous care to patients, require airborne/droplet/contact isolation, and where staff don and doff the PPE infrequently per shift (e.g., in the intensive care unit) ● Using PAPRs primarily for droplet/contact precautions can be challenging due to contamination of the PAPR hood and the possible risk of self-contamination upon removal. The use of PAPRs for droplet/contact transmission could increase the risk of health care worker transmission (which is not a concern for the airborne hazards for which the PAPR was created) if the above precautions are not followed ● Similarly, while contamination of the tubing and high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA)–filtration unit worn with the PAPR hood is typically not a concern with airborne hazards, contamination can occur with droplet/contact transmitted pathogens. Refer to the manufacturer’s instructions on cleaning and disinfection ● Additional concerns related to possible user contamination upon removal relate to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bulkiness of the hood ○ Lack of formal training and practice in removing the hood ○ Lack of validated procedures to attempt hood decontamination before removal ○ Time-consuming manual decontamination and the requirement to handle and decontaminate the accompanying hood and HEPA filtration unit ● For these reasons, PAPRs are not generally recommended for the care of COVID-19 patients in general unit settings where the above concerns cannot be addressed <p><i>Sources of additional information: Appendix D, ANZICS COVID-19 Guidelines¹⁷, U.S. Food & Drug Administration¹⁸, Lawrence et al., 2017.¹²</i></p>

B. Reclaim and Use Certified PPE from Other Sources

Health Canada, the regulator for medical devices in Canada, accepts the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) certification as an appropriate quality standard for N95 masks used by health care workers. They achieve a minimum filtration efficiency of 95% when worn properly. Health Canada states that equivalent alternate standards are also acceptable.¹⁹ Here is the list of certified equipment according to the [CDC](#).

Table 2 describes the other sources for PPE items that meet NIOSH standards.

Table 2. Other sources for certified PPE	
Recommendation	Description
Reclaim PPE from other medical settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recommend reclaiming medical-grade N95 respirators (disposable and reusable) and other PPE through solicited donations or buyback from other medical settings where they are not currently needed. For example, veterinarians, dentistry, universities, dermatology, ophthalmology, and so on. <p><i>Source of additional information: Health Canada is calling for all suppliers to help Canada combat COVID-19.</i></p>
Use PPE from commercial, non-medical settings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This includes disposable and reusable N95 respirators, PAPRs, disposable surgical/procedure masks, eye protection, gowns, and gloves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In circumstances in which traditional N95 respirators and other PPE made for health care settings are not available, we recommend health care workers use commercial-grade non-medical N95 respirators and other PPE Other PPE is marketed to the public for general, non-medical purposes, such as for use in construction and other industrial applications²⁰ We recommend the procurement of commercial-grade N95 masks (disposable and reusable) and other PPE from non-medical settings where it is not currently needed (e.g., mining, construction, manufacturing, laboratories, farming, food safety, chemical, aircraft, and other industry-related settings where non-medical N95 or equivalent respirators are commonly used) The nine types of certified particulate respirators that can be used by health care workers include: N95, N99, N100, R95, R99, R100, P95, P99, P100. Respirators are rated “N” if they are not resistant to oil, “R” if they are somewhat resistant to oil, and “P” if they are oil-proof.^{21,22} Therefore, all of these NIOSH certifications²² will protect health care workers Commercial-grade N95 respirators are not intended to provide liquid-barrier protection and are not tested for fluid resistance; however, fluid resistance is not needed for protection from respiratory droplets during the COVID-19 pandemic

	<p>Source of additional information: Health Canada.¹⁹</p> <p>Ontario Health’s call for PPE: https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-your-organization-can-help-fight-coronavirus.</p>
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C. Use of 3D-Printed Face Shields for Eye Protection

Table 3 describes a recommendation on the use of 3D-printed face shields (eye protection).

Table 3. Recommendation for 3D-printed face shields (eye protection)	
Type of PPE	Description
Eye protection: 3D-printed face shields	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3D printed face shields for eye protection are recommended as an alternate source when traditional commercial face shields for eye protection are not available • There are several 3D printed face shield manufacturers. Ensure they meet the standards⁵ set out by Health Canada. Health Canada provides guidance for 3D printing and other unconventional manufacturing of PPE in response to COVID-19. • Other considerations include the reusability and sustainability as some 3D printed face shields are disposable and others are reusable. <p>Sources of additional information: Health Canada,⁵ Appendix E.</p>

2. Recommendations for the Extended Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

In the context of depleted supplies of PPE during a pandemic, the extended use and limited reuse of PPE should be considered in your contingency plans.

Recommendations for health care organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extend the use of existing PPE: Ensure that health care workers caring for cohorted patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 are following extended-use recommendations as appropriate for their setting

Table 4 (below) describes the strategy for extended use of PPE.

Extended use is applicable to N95 respirators (disposable), surgical/procedure masks (disposable), isolation gowns (disposable and cloth), and eye protection (disposable and reusable goggles and face shields).

Strategy	Description
<p>Extended use</p> <p>Applicable to the following types of PPE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> N95 respirators (disposable) Surgical/procedure masks (disposable) Isolation gowns (disposable and cloth) Eye protection (disposable and reusable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recommend that PPE is used over an extended period of time and over the course of many patients, in settings where it is feasible (e.g., while caring for a cohort of patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 in an inpatient setting). Consider the following key principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extend the use of PPE for as long as possible, but once wet, damaged, soiled, or removed (e.g., to eat or drink), or you exit the patient care area, the piece of equipment should be discarded in the appropriate receptacle. N95 respirators (disposable) that are not wet, damaged, or soiled should be immediately disposed of in a designated biohazard receptacle for possible reprocessing, where available and appropriate Cohort patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, assign designated teams of health care providers, and batch your patient encounters to help conserve the use of PPE Take extra care when removing the PPE as this is when self-contamination may occur Gloves should be changed between every patient encounter Adhere stringently to hand hygiene before and after handling PPE and between patient encounters. It is safe to wear your PPE for

	<p>multiple patient encounters. In fact, you may reduce your risk of self-contamination by reducing the number of PPE changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ While wearing a mask or respirator, take extra care not to touch it. If you do, immediately perform hand hygiene ● After performing an aerosol-generating medical procedure (AGMP) on a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patient, PPE items should be safely removed (“doffed”) and discarded in the appropriate receptacles <p><i>Sources of additional information: CDC,²³ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control²⁴, Association for Professional in Infection Control and Epidemiology Position Paper,²⁵ Appendix F.</i></p>
<p>Layering PPE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Layering involves wearing more than one piece of PPE at the same time, such as complementary items that provide protection to the same area (e.g., an N95 respirator with a face shield over top) or more than one of the same item (e.g., double gloves) ● The evidence to support the practice of layering is inconclusive. However, some guidance suggests that face shields could protect a mask or respirator from surface contamination from larger splashes or sprays. Face shields are being used on top of masks to protect other parts of the face and extend the use of the mask worn underneath <p><i>Source of additional information: Appendix F.</i></p>

3. Recommendations for the Use of Expired Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

In the context of depleted supplies of PPE during a pandemic, the use of PPE that is expired/beyond the manufacturer-designated shelf life should be considered in your crisis plans.

Recommendations for health care organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take stock and inspect any expired N95 respirators (disposable)⁶ and any other stock of expired PPE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expired N95 respirators (disposable) and other PPE that have been stored in accordance with manufacturers' storage conditions require inspection to ensure they are not damaged and may be used when regular supplies are depleted

Table 5 describes the use of expired N95 respirators (disposable) and other types of expired PPE that may be used beyond the manufacturer-designated shelf life.

Type of PPE	Description
N95 respirators ^{6,26-28}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When supplies of N95 respirators are low or depleted, we recommend using expired N95 respirators from existing stockpiles • Inspect these N95 respirators to ensure they are not damaged and have been stored in accordance with manufacturers' storage conditions. Inspection should occur before distributing expired stock • Disclose to health care worker(s) that the N95 respirator(s) are expired and have been inspected before distribution • Before wearing an expired N95 respirator, a health care worker should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inspect for visible damage or soiling ○ Check that the straps, nose bridge, and nose foam are intact, and that the straps remain elastic ○ Perform a user seal check each time they put on a respirator to check that it was donned correctly and that a tight seal is formed on their face • There is no specific timeframe for N95 respirators, beyond the expiry dates, at which they would no longer be considered suitable for use <p><i>Sources of additional information: 3M Technical Bulletin Respirators Beyond Their Shelf Life Considerations,⁶ Health Canada,²⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,³⁰ ECRI Clinical Evidence Assessment,³¹ Appendix F.</i></p>
Surgical/procedure masks, isolation gowns, gloves, eye protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPE products that are expired/beyond the manufacturer-designated shelf-life are typically discarded or used only for testing and training purposes. However, in the situation where supplies are depleted, expired PPE can be considered for use, as they may still provide some protection

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In all cases, PPE should be inspected before use to ensure the product is not soiled, contaminated, or discoloured, with no visible damage like holes, tears; otherwise, the product should be discarded |
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Source of additional information: [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#).³²

4. Recommendations for the Limited Reuse of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

In the context of depleted supplies of PPE during a pandemic, the extended use and limited reuse of PPE should be considered in your crisis plans.

Recommendations for health care organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that health care workers are following limited-reuse recommendations as appropriate for their setting

Table 6 (below) describes the strategy of limited reuse.

Limited reuse is applicable to N95 respirators (disposable), surgical/procedure masks (disposable), cloth isolation gowns, and eye protection (disposable and reusable goggles and face shields).

Strategy	Description
<p>Limited reuse</p> <p>Applicable to the following types of PPE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> N95 respirators (disposable) Surgical/procedure masks (disposable) Cloth isolation gowns Eye protection (disposable and reusable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Limited reuse</i> refers to the practice of using the same PPE for multiple encounters with patients, but carefully removing it (“doffing”) after each encounter, storing it safely, then putting it back on (“donning”) without disinfecting Limited reuse of PPE carries a higher risk of self-contamination than with extended use.³¹ The feasibility of limited reuse may depend on the health care setting. For example, it is not recommended in critical care settings or for aerosol general medical procedures (AGMP). They are better used in settings like assessment centres, etc. Limited reuse has been recommended and widely used as an option for conserving PPE during previous respiratory pathogen outbreaks and pandemics²³ Consider the following key principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The PPE is safely stored between patient encounters and put it back on again (“don”) before the next encounter with a patient Even when reuse is practiced or recommended, restrictions are in place that limit the number of times the same item is reused (therefore referred to as “limited reuse”) Extend the use of PPE for as long as possible, but once it is wet, damaged, or soiled it should be discarded in the appropriate receptacle. Surgical/procedure masks that are not wet, damaged, or soiled should be immediately disposed of in a designated biohazard receptacle for possible reprocessing, where available and appropriate.

- Take great care when removing or redonning the PPE as this is when self-contamination may occur. Also take care to avoid contaminating the inside of the N95 respirator or surgical/procedure mask
- Gloves should be changed between every patient encounter
- Adhere stringently to hand hygiene before and after handling PPE and between patient encounters.
- While wearing a mask or respirator, take extra care not to touch it, and if you do, immediately perform hand hygiene.
- After performing an aerosol-generating medical procedure (AGMP) on a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patient, PPE items should be safely removed (“doffed”) and discarded in the appropriate receptacles

Sources of additional information: [CDC](#),²³ [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#),²³ [Association for Professional in Infection Control and Epidemiology Position Paper](#),²⁵ Appendix F.

5. Recommendations for Non-NIOSH Certified Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

In the context of depleted supplies of PPE during a pandemic, the use of non-NIOSH certified PPE may be considered **with caution** in your crisis plans. This includes evaluation to ensure the PPE meets the same standards of traditional sources of commercial PPE for medical settings.

Health Canada, the regulator for medical devices in Canada, accepts the NIOSH certification as an appropriate quality standard for N95 masks used by health care workers. Health Canada lists N95 respirators as a Class I medical device and they are manufactured by companies that hold a Medical Device Establishment Licence (MDEL). They achieve a minimum filtration efficiency of 95% when worn properly. Health Canada states that equivalent alternate standards are also acceptable.¹⁹ Here is the [list of certified equipment](#) according to the CDC. [Health Canada](#) is fast-tracking the MDEL application process for companies that want to manufacture, import, or distribute Class I masks. Their goal is to complete the process within 24 hours from the time Health Canada receives a completed application.¹⁹

Information for health care organizations

- Take caution when using non-NIOSH certified PPE: Verify the authenticity of and fit test any PPE products that may not meet NIOSH certification

PPE with equivalent certification from other countries:

- Disposable respirators (also called filtering facepiece respirators) are subject to various regulatory standards around the world. These standards apply to certain required physical properties and performance characteristics (e.g., filter performance, flow rate, total inward leakage, inhalation resistance, exhalation valve leakage requirement, etc.)
- Examples of respirators that are approved under standards used in other countries that are similar to NIOSH-approved respirators include: FFP2 from Europe, P2 from Australia/NZ, Special 1st from Korea, KN/KP95 from China, DS/DL2 from Japan, or PFF2 from Brazil. The CDC has compiled [a list of respirators approved under standards used in other countries](#)³³ that are similar to NIOSH-approved respirators
- Products that are not NIOSH-certified need to be verified and validated for authenticity and fit tested to ensure performance²⁰

Sources of additional information: [CDC List of Certifications](#),³⁴ [3M Technical Bulletin: Comparison of FFP2, KN95, and N95 and Other Filtering Facepiece Respirator Classes](#),³⁵ Appendix G.

PPE without NIOSH certification:

- In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic manufacturers may emerge with local capacity to manufacture PPE
- Ensure products used by health care workers meets Health Canada regulations and meets NIOSH standards, including fit testing to ensure performance
- Health Canada has outlined measures to facilitate and expedite access to licensing and registration requirements for PPE to help limit the spread of COVID-19

Sources of additional information: [Health Canada](#)¹⁹, [CDC-NIOSH](#)²²

6. Recommendations on Sterilization and Decontamination Methods for Reprocessing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

In the context of depleted supplies of PPE during a pandemic, using sterilization and decontamination methods to reprocess (i.e., disinfect, clean, sanitize) PPE for future use should be considered in your crisis plans in settings where it can be safely done.

A notice from Health Canada: [Important Regulatory Considerations for the Reprocessing of Single Use N95 Respirators during the COVID-19 Response](#)³⁶ describes the regulatory requirements for reprocessing by a third party organization. We have been advised by Health Canada that this notice does not apply to on-site reprocessing and decontamination by hospitals. Health care organizations who are considering on-site reprocessing should review the principles included to ensure the safety of their chosen sterilization and decontamination method:

- A validated process for disinfection/reprocessing
- Testing for the validation of bioburden reduction/disinfection
- Ensuring a chain of custody and safeguards to prevent inadvertent exposure
- Testing for performance characteristics and fit-testing

Recommendations for health care organizations

- Collect and store used N95 respirators (disposable) for reprocessing with sterilization and decontamination methods:
 - Where feasible, all health care organizations should begin collecting used N95 respirators (disposable) that are not visibly soiled or damaged so that they may be reprocessed for future use using appropriate sterilization and decontamination methods
 - Used N95 respirators (disposable) that are unsoiled and undamaged should be collected and stored in disposal receptacles that are clearly labelled, dated, and separated from other types of PPE (e.g., in a biohazard bag, paper bag, or box). Collect N95 respirators separately from surgical/procedure masks. Consider the feasibility of additional individual tracking needs, as health care workers may prefer to reuse their own masks. Ensure the condition of the N95 respirators are suitable for reprocessing if they have been stored for a period of time
 - If a validated process for disinfecting/reprocessing is feasible at your health care organization, move forward with developing an implementation plan
- Collect and store used surgical/procedure masks:
 - Wherever feasible, all health care organizations should begin collecting used surgical/procedure masks (that are not visibly soiled or damaged) and store in clearly labelled and dated disposal receptacles and separated from other types of PPE (e.g., in a biohazard bag, paper bag, or box). Collect surgical/procedure masks separately from N95 respirators.
 - Although there is currently no clear evidence supporting a validated sterilization and decontamination method for reprocessing surgical/procedure masks, we recognize that the evidence on sterilization and decontamination methods is rapidly evolving; therefore, we recommend collecting and safely storing used surgical/procedure masks for potential reprocessing in the future

Table 7 describes the recommendations for evidence-based strategies for reprocessing PPE, namely N95 respirators (disposable) and eye protection (goggles and face shields).

Table 7. Recommendations for sterilization and decontamination methods to reprocess PPE	
Type of PPE	Description of the sterilization and decontamination method
N95 respirators (disposable)	<p>When reprocessing is required, the following should be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A validated process for disinfection/reprocessing • Testing for the validity of bioburden reduction/disinfection • Ensuring a chain of custody and safeguards to prevent inadvertent exposure • Testing for performance characteristics and for fit-testing
Eye protection (disposable and reusable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reprocess goggles and face shields with appropriate cleaning and disinfection • Goggles and face shields can be disinfected using your health care organization's standard protocol for disinfecting any solid, plastic surface. Discard the item if the disinfectant causes clouding or damage <p><i>Sources of additional information: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention³⁷, Health Canada List of Disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2,¹¹ Public Health Ontario.³⁸</i></p>
Isolation gowns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reprocess cloth gowns with appropriate laundering. We do not recommend reprocessing disposable isolation gowns • Currently there is no clear evidence that disposable isolation gowns can be reprocessed, but there is some laboratory evidence that contamination levels/viral load can be reduced with ethanol-based spray or bleach spray before removal or with use of germicidal pulsed xenon ultraviolet light (PXUV) <p><i>Sources of additional information: Public Health Ontario³⁸, Robinson et al. 2019.³⁹</i></p>
Surgical/Procedure Masks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not recommend reprocessing surgical/procedure masks (disposable) • Currently there is no clear evidence supporting a validated method for sterilizing and decontaminating surgical/procedure masks. We recognize that the evidence on sterilization and decontamination methods is rapidly evolving; therefore, we do recommend collecting and safely storing used surgical/procedure masks for potential reprocessing in the future <p><i>Source of additional information: Public Health Ontario.³⁸</i></p>
Gloves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not recommend reprocessing gloves

- Much like gowns, there is some evidence that gloves can be decontaminated with alcohol-based rub, bleach spray or wipes, or quaternary ammonium wipes before removal

Source of additional information: Robinson et al., 2019³⁹; Kpadeh-Rogers et al., 2019.⁴⁰

7. Recommendations for Alternative Innovation Products

The use of new alternative innovation products by health care workers as PPE during the COVID-19 pandemic is unregulated and untested. Therefore, the committee cannot endorse the use of these products as a replacement for PPE that is intended to protect health care workers from exposure to SARS-CoV-2. The committee will continue to evaluate emerging ideas and innovations to address the need for PPE during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations for health care organizations

- 3D-printed face masks/respirators and fabric/cloth masks are NOT recommended for use by health care workers

Table 8 describes alternative innovation products that are not recommended for use by health care workers.

Table 8. Recommendations on alternative innovation products	
The committee does not endorse the use of alternative innovation products as a replacement for PPE where there is no evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness.	
Type of PPE	Description
3D-printed face masks/respirators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not currently recommend the use of 3D-printed face masks or 3D-printed respirators in place of a surgical/procedure mask or N95 respirator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A 3D-printed face mask/respirator is unlikely to provide the same fluid barrier and air filtration protection as an N95 respirator <p><i>Source of additional information: Health Canada,⁵ Appendix E.</i></p>
Fabric/cloth masks ⁴⁰⁻⁴⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not recommend the use of commercial or homemade fabric/cloth masks by health care workers. These would only be considered as a last resort <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fabric/cloth masks are not able to provide the same level of protection and air filtration as surgical/procedure masks or N95 respirators.⁴⁵ There is variability in their functionality and manufacturing (e.g., fabric type, filter insert) ○ There may be some utility for use by the general public (e.g., visitors or family members in a health care setting), but fabric/cloth masks are not a suitable alternate source of PPE for health care workers <p><i>Source of additional information: Appendix H.</i></p>

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Appendix A: COVID-19 Response: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Committee

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Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Extended use	<i>Extended use</i> refers to the practice of keeping an item of personal protective equipment on for extended periods of time without removing (“doffing”).
Eye protection (goggles/face shield)	There is wide variety of types of protective eyewear used by health care workers. Goggles and face shields provide a barrier to protect health care workers’ eyes and face from expelled splashes, sprays, and bodily fluids by a contaminated person. A face shield is a device that has a transparent window or supported visor in front of the face to shield the eyes and face.
Disposable	<i>Disposable</i> refers to an item of personal protective equipment that is intended to be used only once then thrown away. Also referred to as “one-time use” or “single-use.”
Gloves	Single-use, nonsterile medical gloves are used by all medical personnel and many auxiliary workers in health care settings as a universal contact and droplet precaution to minimize skin contamination and transmission of pathogens. Gloves can be made of different types of material (e.g., natural rubber latex, nitrile, polyvinyl chloride).
Isolation gown	<i>Isolation gown</i> refers to a type of long-sleeved medical cover that offers a barrier to protect health care workers against the transmission of microorganisms contained in substances such as bodily fluids, secretions, and excretions, including respiratory droplets. This may also be called a <i>precaution gown</i> or a <i>protective gown</i> .
N95 respirators	An N95 respirator, also known as a filtering facepiece respirator, is a respiratory protective device designed to achieve a very close facial fit and very efficient filtration of airborne particles. The “N95” designation means that when subjected to careful testing the respirator blocks at least 95% of very small test particles. These respirators are medical devices authorized by Health Canada.
Personal protective equipment (PPE)	<i>Personal protective equipment</i> refers to specialized clothing and equipment worn by health care workers for protection against hazards and to prevent injury or infection. In this document, PPE refers to N95 respirators, surgical/procedure masks, isolation gowns, gloves, and eye protection (goggles and face shields).
Reprocessing	<i>Reprocessing</i> refers to the cleaning, sanitization, disinfection, decontamination, and/or sterilization of devices and equipment in health care settings.
Reuse/Limited Reuse	<i>Reuse</i> refers to the practice of using an item of PPE for multiple patient encounters with but removing it (“doffing”) between encounters without

	disinfecting.
Reusable	<i>Reusable</i> refers to the ability for a product to be used repeatedly with validated methods for cleaning and/or disinfection between uses.
Surgical/procedure mask	Surgical masks, also known as procedural or medical masks, are designed to help prevent contamination of the work environment or sterile field from large particles generated by the wearer/worker (e.g., to prevent the spread of the wearer’s spit or mucous). Surgical/procedure masks may also be used to help reduce the risk of splashes or sprays of blood, bodily fluids, secretions, and excretions from reaching the wearer’s mouth and nose. Surgical/procedure masks do not fit tightly to the face.

Appendix C: Summary Table: Recommendations for PPE Conservation and Sterilization/Decontamination Methods for Reprocessing During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Type of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)		Reusable Option	Extended Use	Use of Expired Stock	Limited Reuse	Sterilization and Decontamination Methods for Reprocessing
N95 respirators	Disposable N95 respirators	x	✓	✓	✓	When reprocessing is required, the following should be considered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A validated process for disinfection/reprocessing • Testing for the validation of bioburden reduction / disinfection • Ensuring a chain of custody and safeguards to prevent inadvertent exposure • Testing for performance characteristics and fit-testing
	Reusable elastomeric respirators	✓	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disinfect by submerge in water and bleach; filter cartridges are removed and replaceable • Clean using disinfectant wipes
Surgical/procedure masks	Disposable surgical/procedure masks	x	✓	✓	✓	x
Isolation gowns	Disposable isolation gowns	x	✓	✓	✓	x
	Reusable cloth isolation gowns	✓	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disinfect by laundering
Gloves	Medical gloves	x	x	✓	x	x
Eye protection	Disposable goggles and face shields	x	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disinfect using standard methods for hard plastic surfaces
	Reusable goggles and face shields	✓	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disinfect using standard methods for hard plastic surfaces

Appendix D: Supplemental Information: Powered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPRs)

This supplemental information was generated by Ontario Health (Quality) to support decision-making and to provide information on powered air purifying respirators (PAPRs) during the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. They examined the recommendations from national and international health authorities and organizations and completed a targeted search of published literature.

The supplemental information can be found here: <https://hqontario.ca/Evidence-to-Improve-Care/Health-Technology-Assessment/Other-Publications/Special-Reports>

Appendix E: Supplemental Information: 3D Printing of N95 Respirators and Face Shields

This supplemental information was generated by Ontario Health (Quality) to support decision-making and provide information on 3D printing of N95 respirators and face shields during the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. They examined the recommendations from national and international health authorities and organizations and completed a targeted search of published literature to determine what is known around 3D printing of N95 respirators and face shields.

The supplemental information can be found here: <https://hqontario.ca/Evidence-to-Improve-Care/Health-Technology-Assessment/Other-Publications/Special-Reports>

Appendix F: Supplemental Information: Extended Use and Layering of N95 Respirators and Use of Expired Personal Protective Equipment

This supplemental information was generated by Ontario Health (Quality) to support decision-making around the extended use and layering of N95 respirators and use of expired personal protective equipment (PPE) during the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. They examined the recommendations from national and international health authorities and organizations and completed a targeted search of published literature to determine what is known about extended use, layering, and use of expired PPE.

The supplemental information can be found here: <https://hqontario.ca/Evidence-to-Improve-Care/Health-Technology-Assessment/Other-Publications/Special-Reports>

Appendix G: Supplemental Information: N95 Equivalents as an Alternative to N95 Respirators in a Health Care Setting

This supplemental information was generated by Ontario Health (Quality) to support decision-making and to provide information on N95 equivalents from other countries during the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. They examined the recommendations from national and international health authorities and organizations and completed a targeted search of published literature.

The supplemental information can be found here: <https://hqontario.ca/Evidence-to-Improve-Care/Health-Technology-Assessment/Other-Publications/Special-Reports>

Appendix H: Supplemental Information: Fabric/Cloth Masks

This supplemental information was generated by Ontario Health (Quality) to support decision-making and to provide information on cloth masks during the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. They examined the recommendations from national and international health authorities and organizations and completed a targeted search of published literature.

The supplemental information can be found here: <https://hqontario.ca/Evidence-to-Improve-Care/Health-Technology-Assessment/Other-Publications/Special-Reports>