

NSHA Position Statement

Healthcare Workers with Chronic Medical Conditions and / or Potential Risk Factors for Severe COVID-19 Disease

This position statement is intended to provide general guidance only.

Any NSHA HCW unable to safely and consistently don, wear and doff appropriate personal protective equipment due to a medical condition should speak with their supervisor or appropriate Medical Staff leader regarding the [workplace accommodation process](#).

1. Protecting the health and safety of all NSHA HCW is an Occupational Health imperative. During the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that the appropriate steps are taken to protect HCW by preventing both their exposure to and transmission of COVID-19.
2. Appropriate steps to protect all NSHA HCW with respect to Covid-19 include:
 - Using [Routine Practices](#) for all patients at all times, which includes a [point of care risk assessment](#).
 - Following the [respiratory illness algorithm](#) when assessing patients who present with influenza-like illness or COVID-19 symptoms;
 - Adhering to [IPC recommendations for COVID-19](#) when caring for a patient with suspected or confirmed COVID-19;
 - Ensuring that proper [donning and doffing](#) procedures are followed whenever personal protective equipment is worn;
 - Being diligent with [hand hygiene](#), and practicing physical distancing [at work](#) and in [community settings](#);
 - Staying home from work when ill, or when directed to do so because of travel history or unprotected* exposure to a COVID-19 case, in order to prevent potential transmission of infection to others.

* unprotected exposure is defined as providing care to a COVID-19 patient, or having direct contact with infectious bodily fluids of a COVID-19 patient, while not wearing the [recommended personal protective equipment](#) .

3. The precautions listed above are intended to be protective of all HCW, including those who may have underlying medical conditions or advanced age. If the precautions listed above are followed, then the HCW with an underlying medical condition or advanced age is not at greater risk of being exposed to the COVID-19 virus than their HCW colleagues.

4. When infected with Covid-19, in general one's risk of hospital admission, more severe disease or death is higher with one or more of the following:
 - Age > 65 years
 - Incremental increase in risk for severe disease after age 70 years
 - Incremental increase in risk for severe disease after age 80 years
 - Cardiovascular Disease
 - Hypertension
 - Diabetes
 - Lung disease including moderate to severe asthma
 - Compromised immunity
 - Many conditions may cause a person to be immunocompromised. This may include medications such as high-dose corticosteroid use, biologics, or other immune suppressing medications, cancer chemotherapies; HIV with AIDS; transplantation (bone marrow or organ) or congenital immunodeficiencies.
5. HCW with underlying medical conditions or advanced age who can competently adhere to PPE and IPAC practices precautions listed above do not require restriction from providing care to patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.
6. No additional personal protective equipment measures or precautions are required for HCW with underlying medical conditions or advanced age beyond those that are advised for any other HCW.
7. **Any** NSHA HCW, who is unable to fully adhere to the [IPC recommendations for COVID-19](#) (e.g. due to insufficient training, physical limitations, etc.) should **not** provide care to patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, regardless of their age or personal medical status.
8. The [IPC recommendations for COVID-19](#) include the use of an N95 respirator when an [aerosol-generating medical procedure](#) is performed. All healthcare workers who are required to wear an N95 respirator must ensure that their N95 respirator fit test is up to date.
9. HCW with chronic medical conditions or advanced age are advised to review the recommendations for physical distancing [at work](#) and in [community settings](#) in order to reduce their risk of acquiring infection with COVID-19 when they are not wearing appropriate personal protective equipment.
10. The above position statement and guidance applies to all care areas including dedicated COVID-19 wards and surgical suites. Clinical leaders and managers should seek support from their People Services Consultant when reviewing staffing needs that may be impacted by staff with underlying medical conditions or advanced age.

11. The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented situation, which can understandably cause significant concern and anxiety for HCW. NSHA employees can access support through the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) (EFAP). EFAP is a free and confidential service available 24/7 and offers a range of services to help NSHA employees and their families navigate through work, health and life challenges.