



Information for paramedics and ambulance first responders

There is an outbreak of COVID-19 (formerly known as novel coronavirus) in mainland China.

Advice on clinical care of a patient with possible COVID-19

When a person in quarantine or self-isolation develops symptoms of concern, particularly difficulty breathing that requires emergency treatment, they have been advised to:

- Call 000 and advise operators that they are in self-isolation because of possible COVID-19; and
- Advise paramedics and ambulance first responders on arrival of their travel or close contact history.

Paramedics and ambulance first responders are advised to follow specific personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements (outlined below) while assessing and treating patients in self-quarantine or isolation, regardless of whether or not respiratory symptoms are present.

General guidance:

- **Contact and droplet precautions** are recommended for routine care of patients.
- **Contact and airborne precautions** are recommended when performing aerosol generating procedures, including intubation and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).
- **Provide advance notice** to the receiving destination to clarify transfer of care arrangements.

Precautions during routine care

The following contact and droplet precautions are recommended during routine care of a patient with possible COVID-19.

1. Place a surgical mask on the patient if they have not already done so, unless this will aggravate breathing difficulties.
2. Perform hand hygiene before donning a gown, a surgical mask, eye protection and gloves.
3. After the encounter - remove gloves, perform hand hygiene, remove eyewear and gown, then perform hand hygiene again.
4. Apply clean PPE and clean any contacted/contaminated equipment and surfaces with detergent/disinfectant.

Aerosol-generating procedures

Aerosol-generating procedures (AGPs) include tracheal intubation, non-invasive ventilation, tracheotomy, CPR, manual ventilation before intubation, and bronchoscopy. Care should be taken when performing AGPs.

Note: Nebuliser use should be avoided and alternative administration devices (e.g. spacers) should be used if possible.

Airborne precautions should be used routinely for all persons in the vehicle during high-risk AGPs. These precautions include:

- Performing hand hygiene before donning a gown, eye protection, a P2/N95 respirator (which should be fit checked) and gloves;
- Having the driver don a P2/N95 respirator and protective eyewear;
- After the AGP, removing gloves (perform hand hygiene), eye protection and gown (perform hand hygiene) and P2/N95 respirator (perform hand hygiene);
- Not touching the front of any item of PPE during removal;
- Disposing of used PPE in a clinical waste bag; and
- Cleaning ambulance equipment and surfaces with disinfectant wipes by a person wearing clean PPE (i.e. gloves, gown, protective eyewear and surgical mask).

Ambulance air flow

During transport, vehicle ventilation in both compartments should be on non-recirculated mode to maximise air changes that reduce potentially infectious particles in the vehicle.

If the vehicle has a rear exhaust fan, use it to draw air away from the cab, toward the patient care area, and out the back end of the vehicle.

Use of PPE in life threatening situations

In circumstances where paramedics or ambulance first responders are providing clinical care in life threatening situations (for example, CPR upon arrival) for a patient with suspected COVID-19, officers may not have sufficient time to adequately apply full airborne precautions.

In these circumstances, officers are advised to ensure their own safety including:

- Use of a surgical mask and eye protection as a minimum precaution, or a (fit-checked) P2/N95 respirator and eye protection if available;
- At completion of the episode of care, removal of gloves (perform hand hygiene), removal of eyewear, gown and mask (perform hand hygiene again);
- Notification of your employer if you have had a close contact with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 without using appropriate PPE e.g. if COVID-19 was not suspected at the time; and
- Seeking advice from your local public health authority regarding any need to be isolated and monitored for symptoms of the virus.

How can we help prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Practising good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence against most viruses. You should:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet
- cover your cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues, and use alcohol-based hand rub, and
- if unwell, avoid contact with others (touching, kissing, hugging, and other intimate contact).

Where can I get more information?

Clinicians:

- Follow jurisdictional guidance and local procedures and if unsure, ask your managers or Infection Prevention and Control personnel

Organisations:

- For the latest advice, information and resources, go to the Australian Government Department of Health website at www.health.gov.au You will find information on COVID-19 symptoms and preventing the spread.
- Call the National Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080. The line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.
- The telephone number of your state or territory public health agency is available on the coronavirus page at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts