



Department of Health

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

HOWARD A. ZUCKER, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner

LISA J. PINO, M.A., J.D.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

DATE: January 6, 2021
TO: Hospitals
FROM: New York State Department of Health

Health Advisory: COVID-19 Guidance for Hospital Operators Regarding Infection Prevention and Control for Hospital Employees During COVID-19 Pandemic

Please distribute immediately to: Hospital Chief Executive Office, Director of Nursing, Medical Directors, Infection Preventionists, Hospital Epidemiologists, and Risk Managers

A surge in COVID-19 cases increases the possibility of exposures for Healthcare Personnel (HCP) working in the hospital and may affect staffing levels. COVID-19 disease transmission will continue until the number of people vaccinated reaches a critical mass. Health care facilities must continue to have measures in place to ensure the health and safety of their HCPs by implementing precautions to protect against the spread of COVID-19.

Hospital operators must ensure that HCPs wear a facemask at all times while they are at the facility, including breakrooms and other spaces where other employees will be encountered. Face masks may be removed when eating or drinking in designated areas where at least six feet of social distancing is maintained. Additionally, a distance of at least six feet should be maintained among HCPs, unless safety of the core activity requires a shorter distance and that healthcare staff are wearing appropriate facemasks. Cloth or other homemade face coverings are not acceptable face coverings for workplace activities that typically require a higher degree of protection due to the nature of the work. For those activities, personal protective equipment (PPE) used under existing industry standards should continue to be used in accordance with OSHA guidelines (accessible at <https://www.osha.gov/personal-protective-equipment>). NYSDOH also strongly recommends universal use of eye protection by HCPs for all patient interactions. Wearing both face masks and eye protection provides better protection for HCPs who might encounter undiagnosed patients who are currently infected with COVID. Please refer to the November 24, 2020 Health Advisory: Universal Use of Eye Protection available at https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2020/11/hcp-eye-protection_guidance_112520.pdf.

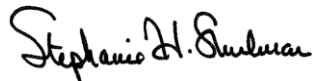
Hospital operators should designate areas and stagger work schedules for HCPs to take breaks that allow them to remain at least six feet apart from one another, especially when they must be unmasked such as when eating or drinking. Hospital administration must modify seating arrangements (e.g. chairs, table) to ensure that individuals are at least six feet apart in all directions (e.g. side-to-side and when facing one another).

Additionally, hospital operators should strongly encourage the use of video or teleconferencing for their HCP meetings whenever possible to reduce the density of in-person

gatherings or meetings. Workplace parties and other social gatherings are a potential source of COVID-19 spread and hospital administration should be reinforcing that these events must not occur in the workplace due to the risk of COVID-19 transmission. If in-person meetings occur, they should be held in open, well-ventilated spaces and hospital administration should ensure that individuals maintain six feet of social distancing between one another in addition to wearing facemasks. Updated Interim Guidance for Business and Employers Responding to Coronavirus 2019 is available on the Centers for Control and Prevention's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>. Additionally, updated Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Healthcare Personnel During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html>.

Please contact hospinfo@health.ny.gov with any additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie H. Shulman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephanie Shulman, DrPH, MS
Acting Director Division of Hospitals and Diagnostic
& Treatment Centers