

IPC and WHS Staff COVID-19 Tips: Eating and Drinking at Work, Personal Clothing, Cleaning Devices and Accessories

Note: These tips were developed in consultation with Dr. Jim Kellner and the Pediatrics Infectious Disease group and Workplace Health and Safety to answer staff questions about eating and drinking at work, personal clothing and cleaning devices and accessories. If department policies and emerging public health directives vary from the general recommendations provided in this guideline, refer to, and follow those policies and directives. If you have any questions or comments contact IPC at ipcsurvstdadmin@ahs.ca.



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Best practice recommendations

1. Eating and drinking at work

1.1. The vast majority of COVID-19 transmission is at close range by droplets or through indirect environmental contamination, e.g., the communal serving utensils at the salad bar. According to the Government of Canada, [safe food practices](#), there is no evidence COVID-19 is spread in food or food packaging. It is, however, very easy to spread germs when eating or drinking in contaminated areas, e.g., nursing stations, reception desks; or sharing food with others, e.g., shared bowl of snacks or using the same serving spoons or utensils.

- It is not safe to eat or sip coffee or other beverages in patient care areas including the nursing station where staff are doing activities such as talking, charting and answering the phone.
- Follow Alberta Health (AH) and AHS rules to minimize COVID transmission, e.g., AH restrictions on [gatherings](#), AHS [Continuous Masking and Patient Care](#), as well as AHS Insite Home > Tools > COVID-19: [Physical Distancing at Work](#).
- To maintain hydration at work:
 - drink fluids on your scheduled breaks;
 - keep a closed beverage container in a clean location, e.g., personal bag;
 - go to a clean, quiet area, i.e., 2 metres away from other people where you won't be multi-tasking, e.g., charting and answering the phone;
 - perform hand hygiene and remove mask and eye protection (if it covers the mouth)
 - perform hand hygiene again before accessing the container;
 - open container and drink;
 - close container and return it to clean location;
 - perform hand hygiene and don mask (and eye protection if necessary).

1.2 Safe food handling measures include:

- performing hand hygiene before and after eating or drinking;
- eating or drinking in a designated clean area such as the cafeteria or a staff room away from patient care activities, e.g., charting;

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- not sharing food or drinks with others;
- refer to Government of Canada [Safe Food Practices](#) and AHS [Decorations, Costumes, Food, Celebrations and Donations Information Sheet](#) for further details.

2. Personal clothing

- 2.1 Personal protective equipment (PPE), i.e., gowns are worn to protect clothing from contamination. By protecting yourself and using PPE properly at work, you are also protecting your family members and loved ones. For more information refer to:
- AHS [dedicated page](#) for PPE. Find information developed by a PPE task force at this [information and support links](#).
 - COVID-19 [Scientific Advisory Group Rapid Response Report](#).
 - AHS WHS COVID-19 [FAQ for Staff](#).
Covenant Health (Cov Health) staff have a separate occupational health and safety (OHS) team where the processes may differ. Cov Health staff refer to the “COVID-19 Info for Covenant Health” section on the AHS COVID-19 Insite landing page for OHSWHS related questions.
- 2.2 AHS issued scrubs are supplied to areas where they are clinically necessary, e.g., to staff on COVID-19 designated units who provide direct patient care and to other areas where required by departmental policy. For more information, refer to the [Healthcare Attire](#) information sheet. Wear PPE over scrubs and uniforms as indicated by the [Point of Care Risk Assessment](#).
- 2.3 Information on hand hygiene is available online, refer to link to [Education](#), including an alcohol-based hand rub [\(ABHR\) video](#).
- 2.4 Hair and shoe coverings are not required PPE. If hair coverings are worn for personal reasons; launder as per the [Healthcare Attire](#) information sheet.
- 2.5 Do not access items such as cell phones from pockets while wearing PPE as reaching under the gown to access these items can cause self-contamination.
- 2.6 Staff showering and bathing practices are not considered important IPC measures for COVID-19 and staff are advised to follow their usual personal hygiene practices.
- 2.7 In addition to the above IPC recommendations, AHS Insite Home > Tools > COVID-19: [physical distancing](#) is being implemented in work spaces to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 at AHS.
- 2.8 Additional tips:
- Washable clothing is preferred in the healthcare setting. Regularly launder clothing in a hot water wash cycle followed by a cycle in the dryer. For more information refer to the [Healthcare Attire](#) information sheet.
 - Avoid wearing dry-cleanable or hand-washable clothes to work.
 - Minimize contact between unprotected clothing and the environment, e.g., do not lean up against walls, countertops, furniture, patient beds/cribs, or medical equipment without a gown protecting your clothing.
 - Change your clothes at the end of a clinical day, either at the hospital or other facility, or once you arrive at home.
 - If you change at work, transport the clothes you have changed out of in either a disposable plastic bag or a washable cloth bag that can be laundered at the same time as the clothes.

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3. Is it a PPE breach if my clothes become contaminated at work?

- 3.1 Soiled clothing is not considered a WHS reportable PPE breach unless blood and body fluid penetrates the PPE onto non-intact skin or is in contact with mucous membranes. Change soiled clothing before leaving work.
- 3.2 A PPE breach occurs when:
 - Recommended PPE has not been worn, resulting in exposure to COVID-19, e.g., mask or eye protection not worn as per continuous mask and eye protection [guidance](#) or fit-tested N95 respirator not worn during [aerosol generating medical procedure](#) (AGMP) on patient with respiratory symptoms;
 - PPE worn has not prevented a blood or body fluid exposure (BBFE), e.g., splashes or sprays of blood or body fluid into eyes or mucous membranes despite use of facial protection;
 - Skin is penetrated, e.g., through gloves by a sharps injury such as a needlestick.
- 3.3 If a PPE breach occurs, contact your zone WHS Occupational Health Nurse by calling 1-855-450-3619 to [report](#) a communicable disease exposure.
 - If a patch of intact skin is accidentally exposed, wash the area with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) and report as a near miss incident on [MySafetyNet](#).

4. Cleaning devices and accessories

- 4.1 Clean and disinfect medical and personal accessories with [ready-to-use disinfectant wipes](#) which effectively kill the COVID-19 virus:
 - Clean and disinfect reusable stethoscopes between patients. Refer to the [IPC Information Sheet on Stethoscopes for Patients on Contact and Droplet Precautions \(COVID-19\)](#).
 - Clean personal accessories such as nametags, if soiled or in contact with the patient environment.
 - Refer to [Use of Mask Extenders](#) for tips about mask extenders.
 - Do not take pagers, cell phones and other electronic devices into the patient environment unless necessary for patient care.
 - If the device(s) is taken into the patient environment; [clean and disinfect](#) the device before entering the room and when leaving the room.

5. Cleaning at home

- 5.1 Many household products are effective for cleaning/disinfecting hard surfaces at home when used according to label instructions.
 - Refer to this [Environmental Public Health](#) document for more details about dilution, high touch surfaces, e.g., tabletops, light switches, door knobs, sink taps, toilet handles, counter tops etc., and cleaning technique.

6. Additional resources

- AHS IPC [Stethoscope Use for Patients on Contact and Droplet Precautions including COVID-19 Patients](#).

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