Workplace COVID-19 Risk Level and Selection of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

During an outbreak, the risk of occupational exposure to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, may vary from very high to relatively lower risk. The level of risk depends in part on the work environment, type of work performed, and the potential for close contact (within 6 feet of another person) for a repeated or extended period of time. To help University units determine appropriate precautions, EH&S has adopted the OSHA Occupational Risk levels and the Washington Department of Labor and Industries criteria to characterize work at the different risk exposure levels, consisting of very high, high, medium, and lower.

While engineering and administrative controls are considered more effective in minimizing exposure to SARS-CoV-2, PPE may also be needed to prevent certain exposures. While correctly using PPE can help prevent some exposures, it should not take the place of other prevention strategies, such as practicing good hygiene, maintaining social/physical distance of 6 feet and staying home when you are sick. Visit the EH&S website for more information about COVID-19 prevention.

All types of PPE must be:

- Selected based upon the potential exposure hazard to the worker.
- Properly fitted and periodically refitted, as applicable (e.g., respirators).
- Consistently and properly worn when required.
- Regularly inspected, maintained, and replaced, as necessary.
- Properly removed, cleaned, and stored or disposed of, as applicable, to avoid contamination of self, others, or the environment.

Additional information about the Novel Coronavirus and COVID-19 for the UW community is on the Novel coronavirus & COVID-19: facts and resources webpage.

All departments and responsible parties should document their PPE plans and requirements, including approvals for any exceptions.
# COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Risk Level Summary

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<th>Risk Level</th>
<th>Risk Description</th>
<th>Job Role / Activity</th>
<th>PPE***</th>
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| **Very High** | Jobs with a high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19 during specific medical, post-mortem or laboratory procedures. | • Healthcare workers performing aerosol generating activities  
• Morgue workers  
• COVID-19 research personnel | • Respirator (N95, PAPR, or tight-fitting cartridge-style respirator) or surgical mask  
• Face shield, chemical goggles, or safety glasses with respirator or surgical mask  
• Disposable gown  
• Disposable gloves |
| **High** | Jobs with a high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19. No aerosol generating procedures performed. | • Healthcare or laboratory personnel collecting/handling specimens from known or suspected COVID-19 patients  
• Clinical Care (e.g., medical, dental, veterinary) and Support  
• Medical Transport (ambulance/airlift operators)  
• Mortuary Workers  
• UW Police (close contact with suspected COVID positive individuals)  
• Campus Safety and Security  
• Maintenance in COVID-19 suspected Student Housing | • Respirator (N95, PAPR, or tight-fitting cartridge-style respirator) or surgical mask  
• Face shield, chemical goggles, or safety glasses with respirator or surgical mask  
• Disposable gown  
• Disposable gloves |
| **Medium** | Jobs that require frequent/close contact* with people who may be infected, but who are not known to be infected. In areas where there is ongoing community transmission, workers in this category may have contact with the general public (e.g., schools, high-population-density work environments, some high-volume retail settings). | • Food Service  
• Medical Facility Screeners and Admit  
• Housing Hall Desks  
• Cashiers  
• Transportation Shuttle Drivers  
• Custodial enhanced disinfection for a known or suspected COVID location | • Surgical mask  
• Face shield or splash barrier  
• Disposable gloves  
• Surgical mask or N95 (voluntary use)  
• Face shield or chemical goggles (splash potential)  
• Safety glasses with face shield  
• Disposable gown (optional)  
• Disposable gloves  
• Surgical mask (required if in COVID-positive housing) or N95 (voluntary use)  
• Safety goggles or face shield (splash potential)  
• Disposable gloves  
• Disposable gown |

*Continued on next page.*
## Lower Risk (Caution)

Jobs that do not require contact with people known to be or suspected to be infected.

Workers in this category have minimal occupational contact with the public and other coworkers.

- Custodians
- Maintenance (including FOMS)
- Utility and Infrastructure
- Security Guards
- Laboratory Staff
- Animal Care Staff
- Mail Services

- Surgical mask (rare cases where close contact is necessary)
- Cloth face coverings are strongly recommended** when working in areas where others are present and there is no exposure to hazardous materials (e.g., hazardous chemical use, work with biohazards). If work with hazardous materials is taking place, a surgical mask and/or other appropriate PPE should be worn.

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* Close contact is defined as being within approximately 6 feet of another person for a prolonged period of time (i.e., more than a few minutes).

** Per a public health directive, individuals are strongly urged to wear cloth face coverings when it is difficult to maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other people to help contain respiratory secretions of the wearer. Follow the [EH&S Guidance on facemask use for COVID-19](#).

*** There are additional industry specific PPE requirements specified in the [Governor’s Phased back to work requirements](#).