

COVID-19 AND PROVIDING FIRST AID

November 2021

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.

Advice on first aid care of a casualty with possible COVID-19

General guidance for First Aiders

- [Standard and transmission-based precautions](#) are recommended for all first aid performed. Contact and droplet precautions are recommended for routine care of casualties.
- **[Compression-only CPR](#) is advised if there is no personal protective equipment (PPE), particularly P2/N95 mask, gloves and eye protection, available for the First Aider.**
- Provide advance notice to receiving responders (e.g. paramedics) to clarify transfer of care arrangements.

COVID-19 infection risk to rescuers from patients in cardiac arrest

The International Liaison Committee for Resuscitation (ILCOR) suggests that:

- Chest compressions and cardiopulmonary resuscitation have the potential to generate aerosols (weak recommendation, very low certainty evidence);
- In the current COVID-19 pandemic, lay rescuers consider chest compressions and public access defibrillation (good practice statement);
- In the current COVID-19 pandemic, lay rescuers who are willing, trained and able to do so, consider providing rescue breaths to infants and children in addition to chest compressions (good practice statement).

Risk Assessment

- Determine if direct contact is required and minimise where possible - e.g. Does the casualty require observation only or is hands-on care required? Can the casualty be assisted at > 1.5m?
- Casualties with flu-like symptoms (i.e. fever, cough, etc) should be assisted if the First Aider(s):
 - has appropriate PPE (should be available in all FA kits)
 - Disposable gloves;
 - Eye protection (e.g. goggles or eye shield)
 - P2/N95 mask (if available and they are required to assist the casualty < 1.5m);
 - Face shields/masks should be used if providing CPR compressions;
 - ensures bystanders are kept at a distance (send them to get help or assist at a distance);
 - cleans any non-disposable items with alcohol-based or other approved sanitiser and performs hand hygiene by either washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub after completing first aid.

- First Aiders concerned about exposure to COVID-19 due to their personal health status (e.g. unvaccinated, pregnant, [immunocompromised or other risk factors](#)) should consider temporarily stepping down from their role and advise their First Aid Coordinator to ensure their staff group is aware they are not able to provide care.
- First Aid Contact Lists should be reviewed and updated to ensure adequate first aid provision.

Precautions during routine first aid

Treat all casualties as a suspected case of COVID-19. The following contact and droplet precautions are recommended.

1. If providing first aid at <1.5m distance, consider placing a surgical mask on the casualty if they have not already done so, unless this will aggravate breathing difficulties.
2. Perform hand hygiene before donning a P2/N95 mask, eye protection (if available) and gloves.
3. [After the encounter](#):
 - a. remove gloves and perform hand hygiene;
 - b. remove mask and eyewear and perform hand hygiene again.
4. [Clean and disinfect](#) any reusable contaminated equipment and surfaces with detergent/disinfectant.

Note: When following the [asthma first aid protocol](#), a spacer should be used if possible.

[Transmission-based precautions](#) should be used routinely for all First Aiders and bystanders. These precautions include:

- Performing hand hygiene before donning a mask (P2/N95 respirator is preferred. If not available, use a surgical mask);
- Use eye protection and gloves;
- After performing CPR, remove gloves (perform hand hygiene), eye protection and mask (perform hand hygiene again);
- Not touching the front of any item of PPE during removal;
- Disposing of used PPE in a clinical waste (biohazard) bag; and
- Cleaning equipment and surfaces with disinfectant wipes by a person wearing clean PPE (i.e. gloves, protective eyewear and surgical mask).

Use of PPE in life threatening situations

In circumstances where first responders are providing CPR in life threatening situations for a patient with suspected COVID-19, First Aiders may not have sufficient time to adequately apply full airborne precautions. In these circumstances, the responder is advised to ensure their own safety by:

- Using a surgical mask and eye protection as a minimum precaution;
- Correctly [removing](#) and disposing of PPE, and performing [hand hygiene](#) at completion of the episode of care
- Disposing of used PPE in a clinical waste (biohazard) bag; and
- Cleaning equipment and surfaces with disinfectant wipes while wearing clean PPE (i.e. gloves, protective eyewear and surgical mask).
- Completing a [hazard and incident notification form via S.A.R.A.H.](#) 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 a GP or other health authority regarding any need to be isolated and monitored for symptoms of coronavirus.

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

Practising good [hand hygiene and cough etiquette](#) 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 mouth and nose when you cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues, and use alcohol-based hand rub;
- If unwell, avoid contact with others and get tested.

Resources

American Heart Association

<https://cpr.heart.org/-/media/cpr-files/resources/covid-19-resources-for-cpr-training/interim-guidance-march-19-2020.pdf?la=en&hash=5A491D18BBB61795442A98A49A50C05173C77EF6>

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care

<https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/Portrait-NSW-Standardised-Infection-Control-and-Prevention-Signs.pdf>

Australian Resuscitation Council

<https://resus.org.au/faq/compression-only-cpr/>

https://seureservercdn.net/198.71.190.10/777.066.myftpupload.com/download/covid-19/flowchart-10-cpr-in-the-community-v-1_2.pdf

<https://seureservercdn.net/198.71.190.10/777.066.myftpupload.com/download/covid-19/resuscitation-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-apr-3-2020.pdf>

Better Health Channel

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/cardiopulmonary-resuscitation-cpr>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Finfection-control%2Fcontrol-recommendations.html

The Department of Health

<https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-paramedics-and-ambulance-first-responders.pdf>

<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/how-to-put-on-and-take-off-your-ppe-covid-19-pdf>

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/how-to-protect-yourself-and-others-from-coronavirus-covid-19/good-hygiene-for-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/basic-tips-safe-environmental-cleaning-coronavirus-covid-19>

The Department of Health and Human Services

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/infectious-diseases/infection-control-guidelines/standard-additional-precautions>

Health Direct

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-groups-at-higher-risk-faqs>

International Liaison Committee on Resuscitation

<https://costr.ilcor.org/document/covid-19-infection-risk-to-rescuers-from-patients-in-cardiac-arrest>

National Asthma Council Australia

<http://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/nationalasthma/resources/First-Aid-Asthma-Chart.pdf>

St John Ambulance Victoria

<https://www.stjohnvic.com.au/news/infection-control-providing-first-aid/>

World Health Organisation

https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/Hand_Hygiene_Why_How_and_When_Brochure.pdf