

COVID-19 Exposure Risk Levels and Selection of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Summary

Measures for protecting employees from exposure and potential infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) depends on the physical work environment, type of work activity being performed, the employee’s ability to wear a face covering, and the need for close contact (within 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period) with other people.

To help employers determine appropriate precautions, Safety and Risk Management (SRM) has adopted the [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\) Risk Levels](#) to characterize job tasks into four risk exposure levels consisting of very high, high risk, medium risk, and lower risk.

Occupational Risk Pyramid for COVID-19

The Occupational Risk Pyramid shows the four risk levels of exposure in the shape of a pyramid to represent probable distribution of risk. Most employees will likely fall in the lower exposure risk (caution) or medium exposure risk levels.

As job duties change, an employee may move from one exposure risk level to another. It is important to conduct a risk assessment and identify when employees are at risk of exposure to the virus at work.

Occupational Risk Pyramid for COVID-19



Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The best way to control a hazard is to systematically remove it from the workplace, rather than relying on employees to reduce their exposure. During a COVID-19 pandemic, when it may not be possible to eliminate the hazard, the most effective protection measures are engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and PPE. While engineering and administrative controls are considered more effective in minimizing exposure to SARS-CoV-2, correctly using PPE can help prevent certain exposures.

PPE should not take the place of other prevention strategies such as maintaining social/distancing of 6 feet, proper hygiene, regular disinfection practices, and staying home if you are sick.

University units should check the [CDC](#) and [OSHA](#) websites regularly for updates about recommended PPE.

All types of PPE must be:

- Selected based upon the potential 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, stored or disposed of, as applicable, to avoid contamination of self, others, or the environment.

The types of PPE required during a COVID-19 pandemic will be based on the risk of being infected with SARS-CoV-2 while working and job tasks that may lead to exposure. University units should review and document their employee PPE requirements for work tasks.

Additional Precautions

The most important precautions we can all take to limit the spread of the virus include:

- Stay home when sick.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after spending time in a public place, before touching your face, after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol.
- Cover coughs and sneezes. Throw used tissues in the trash immediately.
- Continue to follow social distancing and maintain 6 feet of separation between yourself and others.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily

Additional information about the COVID-19 for the WCU community is on [Campus Updates and Resources](#) webpage.

COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment Risk Level Table Summary

Risk Level	Risk Description	Job Role	PPE/Mask
Very High	Jobs with high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19 during specific medical or laboratory procedures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthcare personnel performing aerosol-generating procedures on known or suspected COVID-19 patients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respirator (N-95) • Disposable gown • Disposable gloves • Chemical goggles or safety glasses • Face shield
High Risk	Jobs with high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19. Non-aerosol generating procedures performed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Health Services or laboratory personnel collecting / handling specimens from known or suspected COVID-19 patients • Clinical Care (e.g. medical) and Support • Medical Transportation (ambulance) • Athletic Trainers • Campus Police Officers • College of Health and Human Sciences Nursing and Speech and Hearing / Residential Living Personnel / Professional Personnel for quarantine / isolation residence hall • Counseling and Psychological Services • Safety and Risk Management personnel • Select Facilities Maintenance and Custodial Personnel for COVID-19 response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respirator (N-95) or disposable medical mask • Disposable gown • Disposable gloves • Chemical goggles or safety glasses • Face shield

Risk Level	Risk Description	Job Role	PPE/Mask
<p style="text-align: center;">Medium Risk</p>	<p>Jobs include those that require frequent and/or *close contact with individuals who may be infected with SARS-CoV-2, but who are not known or suspected COVID-19 patients.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange locations (e.g. cashiers, retail) • Information / Support Services (front desk areas) • Food Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposable medical or cloth mask • Disposable gloves • Splash barrier or face shield
	<p>In areas where there is ongoing community transmission, employees in this category may have contact with the general public (e.g., schools, high-population-density work environments, some high-volume retail settings).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation (Cat-Tran) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposable medical or cloth mask • Safety glasses or face shield • Disposable gloves • Disposable gown (optional) • Vehicle splash barrier
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athletics personnel (close contact) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposable medical or cloth mask • Disposable gloves • Safety glasses or face shield
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom or Laboratory (close contact) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposable medical or cloth mask • Disposable gloves • Safety glasses or face shield
<p style="text-align: center;">Lower Risk (Caution)</p>	<p>Jobs that do not require contact with people known to be, or suspected of being, infected with SARS-CoV-2 nor frequent close contact with the general public.</p> <p>Employees in this category have minimal occupational contact with the public or coworkers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Custodial and Maintenance Personnel • Office Personnel • Laboratory Personnel • Classroom Personnel • IT Personnel • Mail Services • Other identified low risk groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposable medical or cloth mask* • Additional PPE is not recommended for employees in this group. Employees should continue to use PPE, if any, that they would ordinarily use for other job tasks.

*Close contact refers to someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.

**Faculty, staff, and students are required to wear a face covering when on campus in the following settings: All classrooms and instructional spaces, walking inside any campus building, any other public indoor setting where physical distancing is not possible, and walking outside on campus in the company of others where physical distancing is not possible.

Face coverings are recommended but not required in the following settings: alone in your private office, alone or with a roommate in a residence hall room, walking on campus with others and physical distancing is maintained, and in an outdoor public setting where physical distancing from others is maintained.