

COVID-19: Road ambulance transfer of patients

18 March 2020

This document outlines infection prevention precautions when managing patients with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection requiring assessment or transportation by road ambulance personnel.

Precautions for ambulance crew

General principles for contact with **all** patients

Perform hand hygiene frequently and in the following situations:

- before donning PPE and doffing PPE
- before and after patient contact without gloves
- on arrival in hospital
- before leaving hospital.

Note: Hand sanitisers must contain at least 60 percent alcohol.

If the situation is not immediately life-threatening, pause approximately 2 metres from the patient. Take a brief history pertaining to symptoms, including any recent international travel and/or recent contact with people suspected of or confirmed with COVID-19. Following initial assessment, establish whether PPE is required to enable closer contact before a more detailed assessment.

Patients presenting with influenza-type illness

Symptoms of COVID-19:

- fever (usually greater than 38 degrees)
- respiratory symptoms (usually cough and shortness of breath), but as with all viral infections some patients may have an atypical presentation.

Personnel should ensure they use the appropriate PPE to limit droplet transmission from patients with suspected COVID-19 if they are going to be within 2 metres of the patient.

- Place a surgical mask on the patient (if tolerated).
- Limit personnel within 2 metres of the patient to those that are necessary.

Recommended PPE:

- single-use surgical mask
- single-use gown
- single-use disposable gloves
- eye protection

PPE to be removed as per normal process.

Guidance for patients in transit:

- patients requiring transport will be those who require further clinical assessment and/or hospitalisation
- minimise aerosol generating activities such as nebulisers
- if nebulising treatment required, crew need to ensure that a N95 mask is worn and properly fitted. All

other donned PPE is adequate

- crew who remain in close contact (see [health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-health-advice-general-public/contact-tracing-covid-19](https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-health-advice-general-public/contact-tracing-covid-19)) with the patient should continue to wear PPE as above
- ensure the receiving hospital personnel have been informed prior to arrival.

Using PPE

- Perform hand hygiene before donning PPE.
- Provide a surgical mask for the patient if they can tolerate it.
- Use a single-use disposable surgical mask, gown, gloves and eye protection (may be reusable).
- Use an N95 mask if within 2 metres of the patient during aerosol generating procedures (for example, nebulising medicines). These should be avoided if possible.
- Perform hand hygiene after doffing PPE.

Ambulance equipment and cleaning

Procedures already in place for ambulance cleaning following transport of a patient with an infectious illness such as influenza are sufficient. Following cleaning and disinfection, the ambulance is 'good to go' once all surfaces are dry.

If you become unwell

If you become unwell with fever or respiratory symptoms following exposure to a patient with suspected COVID-19:

- do not come into work
- limit unnecessary contact with other people
- contact Healthline 0800 358 5453
- inform your manager as per usual process.

Local guidelines

This advice is general. Refer also to your organisational guidelines (eg, St John, Wellington Free Ambulance).

References: St John and Wellington Free Ambulance guidelines