



MedStar Health

# MedStar Health **Nursing.**

## **Focused On: You and Your Health April 2, 2020**

As COVID-19 spreads in our region, we are beginning to see a greater impact on our community...and on you.

The safety and well-being of our associates is a top priority at MedStar Health.

These frequently asked questions (FAQs) will give you the most current information.

- We DO have adequate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Despite frustrating global shortages, our proactive steps are successfully maintaining PPE and other supplies for your safety.
- Global production of medical supplies is slowly increasing.
- We are benefitting from the experience of health experts who have tackled this pandemic over the past eight weeks.
- Occupational Health and COVID-19 testing is more accessible to associates, with expanded evening and weekend hours and new 24/7 phone support.

Our goal: to protect the people who are heroically saving people every day. YOU.

Thank you for staying informed, and for all you are doing as part of the pandemic response.

### *How do we determine what safety protocols to follow?*

MedStar Health Infectious Disease and Infection Prevention teams continue to monitor guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Departments of Health in Maryland and DC, the World Health Organization, professional societies and epidemiologists studying and publishing about this unknown, novel disease. Available guidance continues to support that COVID-19 is transmitted by droplet and contact methods.

### *But MedStar guidance on which mask to wear keeps changing. What is safe?*

The CDC has consistently maintained the recommendation that procedural masks are safe and protective for clinicians taking care of PUI and COVID-19 positive patients, particularly as an acceptable alternative method for protection when there is a limited supply of N95 masks. As the PPE market began to tighten, MedStar Health recommended the use of procedural masks in clinical areas with several exceptions, when a N95 should be used. This includes treating COVID-19 patients in intensive care settings or during an aerosolizing generating procedure (AGP) such as intubation, extubation or suctioning. Given

increasing community prevalence, Medstar Health has now expanded the use of N95 masks to include all PUI and COVID-19 positive inpatient care, when performing any AGP, and when collecting nasopharyngeal swabs for COVID-19 testing.

### ***Why has the guidance changed?***

The current lack of evidence from clinical studies of this new disease, along with changes in practice being released by the CDC, can appear as if hospitals are giving up on any standards. This is **NOT** the case at MedStar Health.

Several important factors have emerged that makes it evident that MedStar Health needs to move to one standard for clarity and to maintain safe practices. These include clear data showing the need for N95 protection during AGPs, seeing more PUI and COVID-19 positive patients and doing more AGPs, and recognition that the increasing numbers of patients we are currently seeing create more likelihood of viral transmission. Procedural masks – along with gowns, goggles and gloves – are still considered safe for general care, but we want to reduce confusion and assure the safety of our team in all situations. So N95 masks will be used in the care of all PUI and COVID-19 positive patients. Because of community prevalence, N95 masks will also now be used at all times when performing any AGP near any patient’s airway, including endoscopy, transesophageal echocardiograms, flexible laryngoscopy and bronchoscopy. They are also in use in Labor and Delivery units for PUI or COVID-19 positive patients..

### ***Do we have enough N95 masks?***

Even with our current daily run rates (usage) at all entities, we are currently maintaining a good supply, which is tracked constantly.

### ***Can we buy more N95 masks?***

MedStar Health proactively purchased N95 masks when they were more broadly available. Although supply chains are now slowly ramping up

production, the market is not yet as robust as it once was. We are working with our suppliers to buy whatever we can, but we are competing with other health systems globally.

### ***What about gowns, gloves and eye shields?***

At this point, supply is good on all three.

### ***Are we going to recycle PPE?***

We are hearing this question frequently, and many nurses have asked us to as part of conserving our supplies. Just as health systems around the US are doing, we’re also exploring several options for conservation, and will only consider safe practices. At this point, we are piloting extended use for face shields and goggles and looking at how to operationalize recycling should it be needed. Our priority is continuing to protect our teams no matter how this pandemic evolves.

### ***What about using a PAPR?***

Although a number of countries and health care systems use some Powered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPR), PAPR use can be limited by:

- The amount of time a health care worker (HCW) can safely remain in the equipment
- Overall supply of Biosafety Level 3 equipment (PAPRs)
- 6 to 7-hour lifespan on filters or cartridges, coupled with a limited supply of replacement cartridges
- The need to disinfect key parts (including hood, motor, waist band)
- Need for two health care workers during the donning and doffing process (care provider and monitor)

MedStar Health does use PAPRs for those who cannot be fit-tested for the N95 masks after consultation with Occupational Health and Emergency Preparedness planners.

### ***Why don't we use coverall suits?***

Currently, the CDC is recommending disposable gowns for COVID-19 patient care, consistent with other infections requiring droplet and contact precautions.

### ***What else is MedStar Health doing to protect associates?***

- General no visitor policy (limited exceptions approved by the CMO/CNO) in all hospitals
- Checking the temperature of visitors
- Mask use by all associates in patient care areas to increase source control
- Enhanced hand sanitizer availability
- Surge capacity planning
- Teams focused on reviewing emerging evidence and information from multiple credible sources (such as professional organizations)

### ***How do I access care if I feel sick?***

All associates who are ill must connect with Occupational Health to report their status. MedStar Health established an Occupational Health Call Center at 1-844-354-3705 to ensure timely support for our associates/physicians in need of screening, triaging or testing for COVID-19. The Call Center is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by trained clinicians

### ***What is current guidance on returning to work?***

This guidance is subject to change as information on the pandemic evolves. Please refer to the Occupational Health Testing Protocol on the StarPort COVID-19 information link.