

# COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control

## Scrubs, uniforms, aprons and gowns

### Introduction

This guidance provides an overview of NSW Health policy and other documents relating to scrubs, uniforms and use of PPE, and answers some frequently asked questions.

### Definitions

Uniform scrubs (supplied by NSW Health to meet uniform requirements) will be referred to as 'uniform' in the document.

Surgical scrubs (theatre attire worn by health workers in theatre or other specialities and supplied by NSW linen service) will be referred to as 'scrubs' in the document.

### What are the relevant policies in relation to scrubs and uniforms for clinical staff?

NSW Health stipulates in the following policy documents when scrubs and uniforms should be worn:

[Uniforms Policy](#) – NSW Ministry of Health

**Employee responsibilities** –employees who are expected to wear a uniform are required to comply with the Uniforms Policy, Local Health District / Specialty Network Uniform and Dress Code requirements, and the NSW Code of Conduct.

**Surgical scrubs** - perioperative attire should not be worn outside of the perioperative environment as per local procedures, with the exception of emergency attendance of patients within the hospital building. An outer gown should cover the front of the attire when leaving the perioperative environment. **Standards for Perioperative**

**Nursing in Australia: Perioperative Attire, ACORN Ed15.**

[NSW Code of Conduct](#) – NSW Ministry of Health

4.3.4 Dress in a way that is appropriate for the work they do, and complies with any local dress requirements (see examples of LHD/SHN Uniform Policies provided at the end of this document).

The Clinical Excellence Commission (CEC) provides advice in relation to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the requirements for healthcare workers. Their guidance documents can be found on the [CEC website](#).

### Is there specific advice in relation to scrubs or uniforms and PPE for clinical staff?

Specific reference is made in relation to health worker (HW) clothing in the [Infection Prevention and Control \(IPC\) Practice Handbook](#):

**Removing PPE (page 64)** - At any time, if a HW's clothing becomes contaminated with blood or a body fluid, the clothing should be removed as soon as practical and before the HW attends to other patients.

If skin is contaminated with blood or a body fluid, the HW must remove contaminated clothing/uniform or PPE and wash any affected skin, then perform hand hygiene.

It is important during this pandemic period that staff do not add any new clothing items to the existing uniform e.g. cloth cap.

PPE must not be worn outside the hospital setting unless it is specific for the clinical service e.g. during a home visit, resuscitation/first aid on campus grounds, COVID screening clinics.

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### How long can the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) virus live on the parts of the uniform not covered by an apron?

There have been no documented cases of transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus via clothing at this point of the pandemic.

[One study](#) found no viable virus on clothing 2 days after exposure with SARS-CoV-2 virus. There is no data that supports transmission via [clothing](#).

### Can I wear my uniform or scrubs outside of the hospital setting?

Health workers can wear a uniform outside the hospital and for community visits as they use PPE to protect their uniforms from contact with blood and body fluid. The PPE protects their uniforms when worn.

Standard and transmission based precautions are both a [NSW Ministry of Health Infection Prevention and Control Policy \(PD2017\\_013\)](#) and NSW Health Practitioner Regulation 2016: Schedule 3 requirement. These precautions protect clinical health worker uniforms:

- In hospitals health workers are required to use appropriate PPE for any close contact with a person who has suspected, probable or confirmed COVID-19 and they are within 1.5 metres. The risk of uniform contamination from wearing the appropriate PPE is unlikely or extremely low.
- In community settings the same principles apply and the recommendations are the

same as hospital settings. That is, if they anticipate close contact or exposure to blood and body fluid, PPE must be worn which includes wearing a fluid resistant apron or gown.

- If a uniform becomes contaminated during community care, the usual local procedures should be applied to remove or spot clean any contamination.
- Changing out of a uniform before leaving work is a personal choice.
- Surgical scrubs are not to be worn outside of the hospital setting.

### Should health workers wear an apron or a gown for standard and contact precautions?

The choice of an apron or gown, based on a risk assessment is well documented throughout the National Infection and Prevention Guidelines and also supported by the Australian Health Protection Principle Committee (AHPPC) for COVID-19.

The risk assessment approach for choosing an apron or a gown for standard and contact precautions remains an option during the pandemic period.

The risk assessment will include patient factors such as their ability to practice respiratory and hand hygiene, the time spent or anticipated within 1.5 metres of the patient and the tasks or procedures the health worker will be doing.

If the health worker anticipates exposure to blood and body fluid on an uncovered part of their uniform, then the risk assessment will direct them to a gown for standard and contact precautions.

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If there are periods of time where there will be direct care provided within 1.5 metres of the patient and no risk of exposure to blood and body fluid on an uncovered part of their uniform, the risk assessment will direct the health worker to wear an apron for standard and contact precautions.

The Healthcare Associated Infections (HAI) Program provides expertise in Infection Prevention and Control and assists local health districts and specialty networks in NSW to manage and monitor the prevention and control of HAIs.

### Examples of LHDs with a Uniform Policy

1. [WNSWLHD](#) – includes information on process if uniform is contaminated
2. [SESLHD](#)
3. [SCHN](#)
4. [Justice Health](#)
5. [NSLHD](#)