

General guidelines for the use of Public Protection Equipment (PPE)

There have been many conflicting reports with regards to the use of Public Protection Equipment (PPE) and Knysna Acting Municipal Manager, Dr Michele Gratz, said that these guidelines from the Western Cape Government should be used as a general rule of thumb.

“In addition to the ‘golden rules’, i.e. social distancing, washing of hands, cough/sneeze etiquette, not touching your face and creating a hygienic home, travel and work environment, PPE equipment can provide extra protection. These include plastic shields, hand protection (various types of gloves), body protection (coats) and respiratory protection (depending on risk – masks) and we’ve listed some general usage guidelines below.”

- **Full PPE** is only applicable to the health environment.
- **Masks**
 - Masks are in general more recommended for health workers.
 - The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that for public-level control of COVID-19 only symptomatic people or their carers wear a face mask. When masks are worn, they recommend that users follow correct safety procedures.
 - If you are healthy and apply the golden rules, and are not caring for someone with COVID infection, you do not need a mask.
 - As COVID-19 prevalence may increase in communities, we recommend the consideration of alternatives to surgical masks with careful consideration for usage guideline.
 - When travelling in a private vehicle or visiting a supermarket, NO PPE (no mask or gloves) is required. Only apply the golden rules.
 - Masks are only effective when used in combination with the other golden rules of prevention listed above.
 - Surgical masks do provide sufficient protection against the distribution of droplets that are created by coughing, sneezing, speaking loudly/shouting. As the epidemic unfolds the use of face masks by all people who are at risk of exposure, even if not sick is a recommendation. These areas of risk are captured in the table below.
 - As COVID-19 prevalence may increase in communities, we recommend the consideration of alternatives to medical masks with careful consideration for usage guidelines.
 - Cloth masks are not ideal, they do provide some protection, yet reduced protection compared to surgical masks. They may be considered when the stage of the epidemic requires extensive measures and surgical masks are in short supply. The handling of cloth masks needs to be done with care due to the risk of it becoming a source of infection. The material and inner lining needs to be different. Denim, calico or similar thick weave cotton should be used and filled with soft cotton. However, to improve the filtration one can use a water-resistant membrane cloth inside to prevent transmission of droplets. Cloth masks to be washed with warm soapy water and dried in the sunlight.
 - Technique related to the handling of masks: Before putting on a mask, clean hands and fit mask tightly on the face, covering the nose and mouth. Do not fiddle with the mask. Avoid letting the mask get wet. To remove the mask, remove it from behind (do not touch the front of the mask), and discard immediately in a closed bin and clean hands.

- **Gloves**

There is little evidence that gloves are useful as a method of protection for members of the public. It provides a false sense of security, does not prevent the transmission of the virus, lead to sweating of the hands and may cause allergy.

- **N-95 respirators** – These are reserved for health care workers at the clinical interface.

Gratz said that it is important not to get a sense of false security when you use PPE items. “Masks can help but research has shown that the 5 golden rules listed above are still the most effective way to combat the virus.”

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