



Determining PPE for Employees Assisting Students Who Require Close Proximity

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Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is an essential aspect of Covid-19 Mitigation. Strategies within school environments such as physical distancing, wearing of masks and handwashing are all designed to reduce the spread of the virus. However, some students with disabilities may not tolerate wearing face masks and may not be able to follow physical distancing guidelines. They may lack hygiene awareness or ability, require physical support, or need physical prompting for hygiene routines. As a result, direct support staff (OT/PTs, SLPs, special educators and support staff, RN's, CNA's etc.) may have frequent daily exposure to body fluids. School Staff may even be in prolonged daily close contact with several students to support instruction, feeding and hygiene. These support factors put students and staff at increased risk of both contracting and spreading COVID-19 if specific appropriate PPE is not provided and used by staff to mitigate risk of transmission.

Students receiving special education support are also more likely to have comorbid medical conditions than their peers in general education. They may need physical assistance from several staff across the school day for care activities and hygiene. Such children are possibly at even higher risk of severe/fatal COVID-19 outcomes.

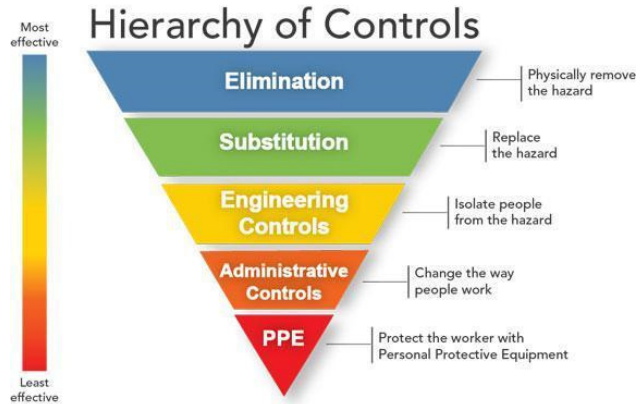
Both OSHA and CDC define direct service providers to include personal care attendants, direct support professionals, paraprofessionals, therapists, and others (OSHA, 2021; CDC¹, 2020; CDC², 2020). These staff may work across multiple classrooms and/or school buildings, thus increasing the risk of exposing other students to and spreading Covid. Without additional PPE worn by staff, these students lose layers of hazard mitigation, placing them at increased risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19 due to the proximity and duration of their exposures.

Because it is unclear which students and staff have been vaccinated or are immune to Covid-19, appropriate PPE use becomes even more important. The goal of PPE in managing hazard exposure risk is to minimize the potential exposure-- on the chance that one of the individuals involved in a prolonged close proximity activity, involving this vulnerable population of students, is in fact carrying Covid-19 and may spread it.

The following pages offer a decision-making paradigm for determination of appropriate PPE for school employees who work in close proximity with students. In this paradigm, decisions are made based on the duration and proximity of daily student contacts.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL’S HIERARCHY OF CONTROLS

The [CDC Hierarchy of Controls](#) offers a paradigm which can be used when making decisions about workplace hazards. Control methods at the top of the triangle are potentially more, universal, effective, and protective than those at the bottom. As summarized by Oregon State University’s Environmental Health and Safety Division, the first three levels of the Hierarchy of Controls describe efforts to control the hazard, the final two levels include efforts to control the exposure of people and the environment. Please see [Guiding decisions about Covid-19 mitigation when standard strategies cannot be used](#). It provides examples of mitigating risk, starting with the inverted triangle's top, most effective levels. These levels provide suggestions to reduce risk and the need for PPE. However, when PPE is needed, consider proximity and duration while reviewing the table below. This table will help determine the transmission risk level, and the appropriate PPE indicated.



PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

When staff is unable to maintain 6 feet of distance from a student or staff members.

Proximity and Duration of Activity	Student/Staff Transmission Risk	Face Coverings	Disposable Gloves	Gowns/Protective Clothing
Close proximity- In passing, a few times/day	Low exposure risk between students and staff	REQUIRED: Mask		
Close proximity- less than 15 min cumulative with one or more students, per day	Medium exposure risk between students and staff	REQUIRED: N95 Mask OR KN95 mask or Cloth mask <u>AND</u> Face shield or goggles	REQUIRED When physically assisting the student	
Close proximity-15 min or more cumulative with one or more students, per day	High exposure risk between students and staff	REQUIRED: N95 mask <u>AND</u> Face shield or goggles	REQUIRED When physically assisting the student	
Close proximity and exposure to student’s mouth, nose, eyes, risk of body fluids	Higher exposure risk between students and staff	REQUIRED: N95 mask <u>AND</u> Face shield or goggles	REQUIRED: When physically assisting the student	REQUIRED

Activity Examples According to Transmission Risk:

These examples are provided to add contextual guidance for determining risk level for the appropriate PPE. They are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive for any student/staff situation. If your procedure falls between risk categories, use the PPE for the higher risk scenario.

Low Transmission Risk: fleeting close proximity up to a few times a day

- Instructing/observing in a setting where students work independently
- Supervising a student's mobility from a distance as they are moving about the school building
- Food preparation in a separate location for students on a feeding protocol
- Suggesting/observing/trialing sensory or adaptive items or exercises with a student who is able to follow verbal/visual instructions
- Assisting a student with occasional navigation on an assistive technology device

Medium Transmission Risk: close proximity to students, less than 15 min cumulative duration per day

- Transferring a student in/out of equipment (short duration transfer)
- Providing instruction in phonics, language/social pragmatics (may include small group)
- Monitoring a student's eating for pacing or overstuffing by providing verbal cues from a distance
- Administering basic first aid
- Donning/doffing student orthotics or other braces/splints
- Suggesting/trialing sensory or adaptive items or exercises with a student who needs physical assistance

High Transmission Risk: close proximity to students, more than 15 min cumulative duration per day

- Transferring and repositioning a student in/out of equipment
- Providing prompts and/or physical assistance for a student that needs close proximity to perform educational tasks
- Supporting students who can feed themselves but require verbal/visual cues to encourage safe eating. Staff seated across the desk within 6 ft and plexiglass barriers in place
- Providing articulation therapy for one student at a time in a well-ventilated space (substitute clear mask for N95 mask)
- Assisting a student with sensory needs that require hands-on application of sensory techniques and physical direction throughout their day

Higher Risk Transmission Examples: Close proximity to students with risk of contact with body fluids, and/or direct exposure to mouth/nose/eyes,

- Feeding a student or providing physical assistance such as jaw stabilization), etc.
- Performing bathroom procedures including:
 - a. Changing a student's diaper
 - b. Assisting with a student's hygiene at the toilet
 - c. Assisting a student with clean up and clothing change after a toileting accident.
- Working within arm's reach of a student who places hands into their mouth and reaches/grabs at staff
- Oral Motor Evaluation
- Swapping out a saturated bib/clothing for-clean ones, with a student who can't manage their oral secretions

References

- Center for Disease Control¹, (2020). Your Health: People with Certain Medical Conditions, Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>
- Center for Disease Control², (2020) Your Health: People with Disabilities, retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-disabilities.html>
- Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Division, (2021). Oregon Administrative Rule 25437-001-0744: Rule Addressing COVID-19 Workplace Risks, retrieved from <https://osha.oregon.gov/OSHARules/div1/437-001-0744.pdf>