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| Fit-Testing Deployment Guidance |
| Respiratory Protection Program |
| Revision 2, 21 October 2021 |

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# In the changing COVID-19 environment, content is often being updated. To ensure you are aware of the most recent changes, all content updates, and the date the document was last updated will be highlighted in yellow text.

# Introduction

This **Fit-Testing Deployment Guidance** has been developed to support the deployment of fit testing capacity in response to changing risks of COVID-19 transmission in the community.

This Guidance is targeted as private health services, aged care providers and wider healthcare organisations that are not participants in the current Victorian Respiratory Protection Program (RPP), which covers Victorian public health services.

This Guidance outlines the processes and resources that can be utilised to assist with the rapid deployment of trained fit testers and fit testing equipment to assist with fit testing of frontline healthcare workers (HCWs) working in high-risk settings for transmission of COVID-19, such as residential aged care facilities, residential disability services and primary care practices (including GP practices) during an active outbreak[[1]](#footnote-2).

It also provides useful links to relevant resources and contacts.

# What is fit testing and why is it important?

In response to analysis of rates of HCW infection during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, a range of measures were put into place to better protect HCWs and to support their wellbeing. This included a review of respiratory protection equipment (RPE), expanded use of respirators and additional education and training support on infection prevention and control.

Protection from respiratory hazards including airborne infectious agents, dust and other particles during the COVID-19 pandemic requires reasonable and proactive precautionary measures, identified through a local risk assessment in accordance with local procedures, relevant standards and other guidance material and documenting a hierarchy of controls for controlling risks in the workplace.

The use of respiratory protection equipment, such as well fitted filtering facepiece respirators, also known as a P2 or N95 masks, is an important element of defence in the hierarchy of infection prevention measures. Fit checking and fit testing assist healthcare workers to identify and to be wearing the right respirators.

**Fit checking** is the procedure performed by the wearer each time a respirator is used to self-determine that the respirator is correctly donned and is a minimum safety standard to ensure appropriate respiratory protection.

**Fit testing** is a validated method to independently determine whether a specific make, model and size of respirator achieves a proper fit to an individual’s face.

Both are important in protecting healthcare workers, as without an adequate fit, the degree of protection provided by respirators is reduced.

## What is the Victorian Respiratory Protection Program?

The Victorian Respiratory Protection Program (RPP) supports Victorian public health services in their implementation of respiratory protection processes to minimise the risk of respiratory hazards for healthcare workers[[2]](#footnote-3), such as airborne infectious agents.

HCWs exposed to persons with clinical and epidemiological features of respiratory infections, especially if in association with aerosol-generating procedures (AGP) and aerosol generating behaviours (e.g. behaviours such as screaming, shouting, crying out and vomiting), are particularly at risk for transmission of respiratory viruses including COVID-19.

All healthcare workers who are required to wear respiratory protection equipment (RPE) should undertake fit testing, with priority given to those in high risk settings.

# Supporting fit-testing deployment

A rapid response may be required to support the deployment of rapid fit testing capacity in response to changing risks of COVID-19 transmission in the community. This may involve access to equipment and other fit testing resources.

## Accessing fit testers

**External providers**

External fit test providers offer a range of services relating to fit testing and are able to rapidly deploy capacity as needed.

For external organisations, it is the strong preference of the department that external fit test providers be accessed first before any requests are made to redeploy internal capacity within Victorian public health services, noting the fit testing of the frontline hospital workforce is a critical priority at this time.

External fit test providers can be accessed as follows:

1. by contacting an external fit test provider approved and listed on the Health Purchasing Victoria (HPV) Panel. Many of these provide both fit tester training to staff and conduct fit testing of HCWs on site. The list of Panel providers can be accessed at: <https://healthsharevic.org.au/contracts-and-documents/contracts/details/451/files>. A list of external providers on the panel and their website details is at Appendix 1.
2. by contacting other external fit test providers outside the HPV Panel who have the appropriate experience and/or accreditation. A helpful external list of wider fit testing providers in Australia can be obtained from the AIOH website, though this is not an exhaustive list of all providers: <https://respfit.org.au/find-a-fit-tester/>

**Internally trained fit testers**

Victorian health services state-wide have trained internal staff to undertake the fit testing of their healthcare workers, clinical and non-clinical, working across a range of settings, including public sector residential aged care facilities associated with their service (PSRACs).

The department may be able to assist with the deployment of trained health service staff if there is an urgent need to upscale fit testing in alternative settings.

Again, it is the strong preference of the department that external fit test providers be accessed first before any requests are made to redeploy internal capacity within Victorian public health services, noting the fit testing of the frontline hospital workforce is a critical priority at this time.

For further information, email the RPP team: VicRPP@health.vic.gov.au.

## Accessing machines

If engaging an external provider, many providers will be able to provide fit testing machines alongside trained fit testers who are able to operate those machines immediately.



If interested, an organisation can contact the suppliers direct to enquire about the purchase of a machine and consumables:

PortaCount: Phone: (03) 9873 1022

AccufFIT: 9000 Phone: (03) 9464 2300

Note: Fit testing machines can only be accessed by Victorian Public health services.

## Accessing PPE

**Victorian health services**

HealthShare Victoria (HSV) supports Victoria’s public health services in maintaining continuity of supply and sources a range of products on behalf of health services from HSV contracted suppliers and new suppliers, including for surface disinfectants, gloves, protective apparel (gowns, face shields, protective eyewear etc) and pathology consumables.

In relation to P2/N95 respirators, requests for a supply of respirators for fit testing from the state supply chain can be made by health services via email: Covid19ppeordering@monashhealth.org. A pack of respirators will be provided, with each pack consisting of a proportion of the products available in large volumes as well as some products that are only available in smaller volumes.

Fit testing relies on a steady supply of a consistent brand and type of PPE. Given fit testing is specific to a particular brand or type of PPE, if there is significant variation in PPE provided to healthcare workers then fit testing will need to be performed again for each individual for each type of respirator.

**Other services**

The supply of PPE for Commonwealth Government-funded services (residential and in-home care) is available through the Commonwealth National Medical Stockpile.

The National Medical Stockpile can be contacted for information about accessing the Commonwealth Government's strategic reserve of drugs, vaccines, antidotes and protective equipment for use in national health emergencies.

* **For Primary Care** personal protective equipment (PPE) requests and to discuss other Primary Care matters – please contact phncovid-19@health.gov.au
* **For Aged Care** personal protective equipment (PPE) requests and to discuss other Aged Care matters – AgedCareCOVIDPPE@health.gov.au
* **For National Medical Stockpile** personal protective equipment (PPE) requests and to discuss other National Medical Stockpile matters – Stockpile.Ops@health.gov.au
* **For NDIS** personal protective equipment (PPE) requests and to discuss other NDIS matters- NDISCOVIDPPE@health.gov.au
* **For Private hospitals** personal protective equipment please contact private suppliers
* **For Tertiary Institutions (including TAFE)** personal protective equipment (PPE) requests and to discuss other matters -Covid19PPErequest@health.vic.gov.au

## On site facility requirements for fit testing

If a facility, such as an aged care or disability residential facility, requires urgent assistance with fit testing of staff, and fit testing is to occur on site, suitable facilities and amenities will need to be available.

If fit testing is offered on site, the following will need to be available:

* a clean room large enough to ensure appropriate aerosol concentration and to achieve physical distancing
* appropriate amenities including table, power-points, storage space for masks and other items, storage space for disposable equipment
* suitable waiting area for those awaiting fit testing
* access to handwashing or sanitising facilities/running hot and cold water

## Fit testing methodology

All healthcare workers must provide signed consent to participate in fit testing, including confirmation that they are both physically and psychologically fit.

**Quantitative fit testing**

In Victoria, it is preferred that quantitative fit testing is conducted. Quantitative fit testing requires the use of specialised particle counting equipment (such as a PortaCount™ Plus machine or an AccuFIT machine) to provide quantitative, or numerical, measurements of the amount of face seal leakage present when a given RPE model is donned by the user.

**Qualitative fit testing**

Whilst the preferred method of fit testing is Quantitative, the alternative method of RPE fit testing is qualitative fit testing[[3]](#footnote-4). A qualitative fit test is fast and simple but it can be influenced by the wearer. It relies on the wearer’s senses to determine if there is a gap in the seal of the RPE to the wearer’s face. A test agent such as saccharin or Bitrex™ (a bitter tasting substance) is used at a sensitivity level that demonstrates the user will be able to appropriately sense the presence of the test agent within the RPE by taste, smell or the urge to cough if the fit of the RPE is not adequate.

## Just-in-time fit testing

During public health emergency responses, it may be necessary to fit test a significant number of workers who are not normally required to wear respirators because their job does not typically place them at risk for exposure to respiratory hazards. This may occur across the whole health system, or in localised areas in response to an outbreak. In these circumstances only, ‘just-in-time’ fit testing may be implemented as a way to fit test large numbers of workers quickly. It will require access to appropriate physical facilities, fit test machines and consumables and access to respirators for fit testing.

‘Just-in-time’ fit testing involves an experienced fit test operator providing training for up to 5 people simultaneously to be fit test operators. This simplified training should ensure the new fit test operators are competent and safe with basic fit test protocols and be condensed into a short timeframe. Those five people can then conduct fit tests for the remaining workers. The result is six operators who can fit testing up to five people each at a time, thus the number of people being tested in a day is much higher. These fit test operators must undergo standard training if they wish to continue the role of fit testing after the immediate need is over.

Just-In-Time fit testing is only recommended in critical health emergency responses.

## Useful links:

Supporting information is available from WorkSafe Victoria <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/prevention-and-management-exposure-coronavirus-covid-19-healthcare-and-social-assistance-industry>

Department of Health (DHHS) [Infection prevention control resources - COVID-19 | health.vic.gov.au](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/infection-prevention-control-resources-covid-19)

Victorian Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines (v6) [For health services and professionals - COVID-19 | health.vic.gov.au](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/for-health-services-and-professionals-covid-19)

The Victorian Health Service Guidance and Response to COVID-19 Risks (VHSGR) [Victorian health service guidance and response to COVID-19 risks | health.vic.gov.au](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/victorian-health-service-guidance-and-response-to-covid-19-risks)

**Australian/New Zealand Standards**

Standards Australia AS/NZS 1715:2009 - Selection, use and maintenance of respiratory protective equipment

Standards Australia AS/NZS 1716:2012 - Respiratory protective devices

Standards Australia AS 4381:2015 - Single-use face masks for use in healthcare

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Private panel providers contact details

External Fit tester Providers contact details **(Victoria based)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Provider and contact | Website  |
| ADE Consulting Group (VIC) Pty Ltd | <https://ade.group> |
| AMCOSH Pty Ltd |  <https://www.amcosh.com.au/>  |
| AusHealth Corporate Pty Ltd | <https://www.aushealth.com.au/> |
| Australasian Safety Services Pty Ltd | <http://www.aussafety.com.au/> |
| Chepstowe Environments | <http://chepstowe.com.au/index.html> |
| EdgeGroup Pty Ltd | <https://www.edgegroup.net.au/> |
| Environmental Health Solutions | <https://www.ehsolutions.com.au/> |
| Eva and Associates | <https://www.evaandassociates.com.au/> |
| Fit Test Australia | <https://www.fta.net.au/> |
| Greencap Pty Ltd | <https://www.greencap.com.au> |
| Hazard Alert  | <https://www.hazardalert.com.au/> |
| Health Safety Environments Australia Pty Ltd | <http://www.hseaustralia.com.au/> |
| Hibbs and Associates Pty Ltd | <https://hibbs.com.au/> |
| KINNECT Pty Ltd | <https://www.kinnecttraining.com.au/> |
| Prensa Pty Ltd | <https://www.prensa.com.au/> |
| Statewide Audiological Services Pty Ltd | <https://www.statewideairandnoise.com.au/> |

External Fit Tester providers contact details **(Interstate)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Assured Equipment Services Pty Ltd (Allens Industrial Products) (QLD) | <https://www.allensindustrial.com.au/> |
| Onsite Safety Australia Pty Ltd (NSW) | <https://www.onsitesafetyaustralia.com.au/> |
| Pro Safety and Training (QLD/NSW) | <https://prosafetytraining.com.au> |

To receive this document in another format, phone 1300 650 172, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email Victorian Respiratory Protection Program <Vicrpp@health.vic.gov.au>.

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1. An active outbreak is defined as where a healthcare worker (clinical or non-clinical) or resident of the facility has been infected. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [Healthcare Worker Infection Prevention and Wellbeing Taskforce | health.vic.gov.au](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/healthcare-worker-infection-prevention-and-wellbeing-taskforce) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. A facial fit test giving pass/fail results and relying on the subject’s response to a test agent.AS/NZS 1715:2009 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)