



On 29 October 2021, the Australian Government announced the \$180 million **Living with COVID-19 Primary Care Package** to further strengthen and support the health system as high vaccination levels allow Australia to open up. With a highly vaccinated population, most COVID positive people are unlikely to get severely unwell or require hospitalisation and will be able to be managed in the community – where clinically safe and appropriate. As part of this package and to support the safe management of COVID positive patients the Government is making additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) available to general practice.

Distribution of PPE through PHNs: Access to the National Medical Stockpile for health care workers treating COVID-19 patients in the community.

This guidance is to support the supply of PPE and Pulse Oximeters from the National Medical Stockpile (NMS) for General Practice, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) and General Practice Respiratory Clinics (GPRCs) through Primary Health Networks (PHNs). The PPE are for services caring for COVID positive patients only.

What has changed?

Under the existing PPE supply arrangements, practices can only access PPE where there is no local supply available commercially or from a State or Territory government scheme, where practices have a population which may be more likely to have been exposed to the novel coronavirus and/or have unusual numbers of patients presenting with respiratory symptoms. While this arrangement continues, the expanded program provides comprehensive PPE bundles that are intended to support approximately 4 weeks of COVID positive patient consultations per clinical staff member (i.e. 40 patient consultations – 20 patients with 2 consultations each) will be made available to all:

- GPs, ACCHSs and GPRCs willing to treat COVID positive patients face-to-face, until 30 June 2022;
- ACCHSs and rural and remote¹ GPs willing to treat COVID positive patients virtually and respiratory patients face-to-face, where workforce capacity is limited AND the GP is serving the community for most or all health needs, until 30 June 2022.

In addition, P2/N95 respirators and eye protection will be provided to all GPs and GPRCs willing to support COVID positive people virtually, and respiratory patients face-to-face, until 31 March 2022.

What can be ordered under this PPE bundle arrangement?

PPE bundles contain P2/N95 respirators, either goggles or face shields, full length gowns, gloves, surgical masks and hand sanitiser.

In addition, pulse oximeters are a separate orderable item (currently, a max. 5 per practice in hotspot or outbreak regions as a preemptive order as the NMS receives more stock) – see updated PHN PPE request form. It is at the discretion of the clinician to assess patients who are at high risk of developing serious symptoms and provide a pulse oximeter to use at home. One (1) PPE bundle is available for order per clinician. However, clinicians with an existing high COVID caseload, or who are in a hot spot or outbreak region, can apply for top up PPE or additional pulse oximeters, via their PHN as required. Health

¹ Rural and Remote areas is defined as RRMA zones 3-7, as per <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/health-workforce/health-workforce-classifications/rural-remote-and-metropolitan-area>

professionals will be required to certify that they are not receiving free PPE from other sources and to ensure that clinics are not stockpiling, or accessing multiple sources of free PPE. Monitoring of PPE volumes will be checked against healthdirect and MBS data caseload data.

Table 1: PPE bundle

Product Type	PPE bundle contents	GPs, ACHHS and GPRCs willing to treat COVID positive patients face-to-face	Rural and remote GPs and ACCHS treating COVID positive patients virtually and respiratory patients face-to-face	GPs treating COVID positive patients virtually and respiratory patients face-to-face
P2/N95 respirators	90 units	✓	✓	✓
Goggles / face shields	40 units	✓	✓	✓
Gowns	40 units	✓	✓	
Gloves	100 units	✓	✓	
Surgical masks	80 units	✓	✓	
Hand sanitiser (bottle)	2 units	✓	✓	
Product Type	Per practice			
Pulse Oximeters	5 units	✓	✓	

When can GPs, GPRCs and ACCHSs request access to PPE through the NMS?

From 14 December 2021 the Department of Health will provide access to requisite PPE bundles as per the above Table, from the NMS via PHNs to GPs, GPRCs and ACCHSs who are not receiving free PPE from other sources e.g. from state or territory governments. GPs, GPRCs and ACCHSs will need to contact their PHN, utilising the updated PHN PPE request process e.g. request form. PHNs will be expected to specify and communicate their process for ordering/distribution with GPs, GPRCs, and ACCHSs in their region. As per existing processes, orders are to be placed by the PHN at the beginning of the week by no later than Tuesday. Due to the approaching holiday period, orders must be submitted on Friday 17 December 2021. Orders will resume on 4 January 2022.

What are PHN obligations?

PPE bundles may need to be re-configured/ assembled at the PHN, with delivery to GPs, GPRCs and ACCHS through existing arrangements in place with the local PHN. The assembly and distribution of the PPE bundles will need to be coordinated by the local PHN until a national distributor is appointed early in 2022, after which the PHNs will remain only as the central NMS ordering point for health professionals.

More information

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the ‘Distribution of masks through PHNs – Version 4 (05/08/2020).

For more information, please refer to:

- the Department of Health “A Practical Guide to Providing Care in the Home for COVID-19 Positive Clients” **[Distributed to PHNs 23 Nov]**
- [Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare \(2021\)](#)
- [The Communicable Diseases Network Australian \(CDNA\) series of National Guidelines](#)
- [The Infection Control Expert Group \(ICEG\) guidance on the use of PPE for health workers in the context of COVID-19](#)
- [The World Health Organization \(WHO\) PPE guidelines](#)
- [Managing COVID-19 at home with assistance from your GP](#)
- [Optimising the use of personal protective equipment in general practice during COVID-19](#)

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au