

April 14, 2020

ECC GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

Interim Guidance on the Use of PPE for Surgical Procedures

The decision to operate or not operate on a patient should not be made based on a patient's COVID status. Surgical decisions should be made based on the guidelines for urgent, emergent, and oncological procedures currently in use.

- For patients who are known to be COVID positive, or suspected to have COVID, these procedures will be done in the COVID OR's with all operating room staff using N95 and appropriate PPE protection.
- For patients who are not known to have COVID and are asymptomatic, a careful Point of Care Risk Assessment (PCRA) will be undertaken that will screen for the common as well as the uncommon COVID symptoms. Based on a negative PCRA, patients will be classified as non-COVID. Note that a PCRA in this context is broader than just a symptom history – it needs to incorporate all elements of risk such as travel, contacts, adherence to social distancing, and exposure to a LTC or Congregate Living setting.
- It is recognized that there is growing concern regarding asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic COVID spread. Statistically, the chances of this are very low in Alberta but are incompletely understood. For this reason, the following will apply:
 - For non-COVID patients, continuous surgical masks and usual PPE are most appropriate as there is an extremely low risk to HCWs of spread of COVID with carefully screened patients.
 - Recognizing the ongoing concern HCWs have about possibly asymptomatic spread, HCWs may judiciously use N95 masks at their own discretion during AGM, and for the remainder of the procedure (as per the IPC point of care risk assessment).

Guidance on the Use of Pre-Operative Testing for COVID-19

There is no role for pre-operative testing using molecular detection of virus in the nasopharynx ("NP Swab") at this time.

- The burden of COVID virus in the nasopharynx may be below the threshold of detectability at the time of the swab, but may increase to above the threshold of transmissibility at the time of the procedure. This is particularly true when a lag of more than 24 hours occurs between swabbing and reporting of the test.
- Therefore there is significant risk of false reassurance from a negative test, which may in turn lead to less stringent adherence to required precautions and use of PPE.
- Delaying surgical care in true emergency situations while awaiting a COVID swab result may result in unnecessary morbidity or mortality, without adding value to the decision making process.
- Testing criteria are determined by the Public Health Policy arm of Alberta Health. Direction from this body on April 9, 2020 specifically states that preoperative testing is not approved.
- Future testing options, including point of care testing, will require additional review once available.