

# Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Optimization Fact Sheet For Assisted Living Facilities



Assisted living facilities (ALFs) are at high risk for SARS-CoV-2 spread due to their congregate nature and population served. This ALF-focused fact sheet highlights common recommendations and clarifications to promote infection control best practices and alignment with [CDC](#) and [DHS](#) guidance. These infection control practices can help protect residents and staff from COVID-19 outbreaks that could contribute to severe infections and hospitalizations and can also be used to prevent spread of other communicable diseases.



## What is PPE optimization and when should a facility consider using it?

- ◆ When PPE is in short supply, such as during a pandemic, strategies can be used to conserve supplies by implementing [extended wear or limited re-use](#) of specific types of PPE.
- ◆ Decisions about whether and how to use PPE in ways that differ from normal standards of care are complex. Before implementing any of the three strategies to extend PPE use, review [CDC's Strategies for Optimizing the Supply of PPE during Shortages](#) to understand specific practices that can be considered for each type of PPE when operating in Conventional, Contingency, or Crisis Capacity.



Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/strategies-optimize-ppe-shortages.html>

## What general concepts should facilities remember when thinking about PPE optimization?



- ◆ **Order:** Optimization strategies should be implemented in sequential order, from Conventional to Contingency to Crisis Capacity, rather than moving from Conventional right to Crisis Capacity.
- ◆ **Temporary:** Return to Conventional Capacity (normal standards of care) as soon as PPE inventory permits.
- ◆ **Specific:** Only use optimization strategies for the specific type of PPE in short supply. For example, if gowns are limited and need to be reused (Crisis Capacity), but there are enough gloves (Conventional Capacity), then gloves should be thrown away after each use. Facilities can use [CDC's PPE burn rate calculator](#) to estimate how long current supplies of each type of PPE will last.
- ◆ **Clean and Disinfect:** All optimization strategies are dependent on appropriate cleaning and disinfection of equipment. Disinfectant products used during the COVID-19 pandemic should be on [EPA's List N](#) to ensure efficacy against the SARS-CoV-2 virus.



## PPE Optimization Dos and Don'ts

It is essential that ALFs are familiar with [specific optimization strategies](#) for each type of PPE as they offer a continuum of options to use based on the facility's PPE inventory. The following reminders, based on COVID-19 pandemic experiences, can also help facilities keep staff and residents safe and healthy.

### DO:

- ◆ **Prioritize staff education and training on PPE, especially as supplies change.**  
Review CDC's 12-minute video, [Use Personal Protective Equipment Correctly during COVID-19](#), and consider incorporating it into new staff training and regularly during all-staff meetings, especially when in-house PPE supplies change.
- ◆ **Ensure staff understand how to safely don (put on) and doff (take off) PPE.**  
Processes for [donning and doffing](#) will differ from standard procedure while optimizing PPE and may need continued adjustment over time. This includes a careful review for safety when new suppliers, new brands or models, or new optimization strategies are put in place.
- ◆ **Create a process for auditing staff PPE use.**  
Routine PPE use audits are always important, but especially so when optimization strategies are in use. Create or adapt a formal [PPE audit tool](#) to help understand actual usage by staff and identify knowledge gaps or procedure misunderstandings that can inform staff education.
- ◆ **Confirm all staff understand how to clean and disinfect reusable items.**  
Several PPE optimization strategies involve reusing PPE, but doing so safely requires that all staff follow necessary cleaning and disinfection procedures (e.g., when to wash reusable isolation gowns, when and how to clean and disinfect face shields or goggles).

### DON'T:

- ◆ **Don't underestimate the importance of hand hygiene.**  
Correct and consistent hand hygiene is critical for keeping staff and residents safe. CDC's [Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings](#) webpage has a wealth of resources, including a 7-minute video, [Clean Hands: Combat COVID-19](#), specifically designed for frontline staff.
- ◆ **Don't wear multiple layers of the same type of PPE.**  
Wearing additional layers of PPE makes it difficult to distinguish between clean and potentially contaminated PPE, makes donning and doffing procedures difficult, and has led to outbreaks.
- ◆ **Don't let optimization strategies become the new normal.**  
Optimization strategies should only be used when PPE supplies are inadequate or unavailable. The PPE supply chain is always changing and efforts to source adequate PPE are an important investment in the health and safety of residents and staff.

### For additional questions, contact:

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