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Media Release

Protecting Frontline Health Care Workers from COVID-19

The AIOH acknowledges the tireless work and selfless risk that doctors, nurses and other health care professionals place themselves in every day to treat individuals who require lifesaving medical treatment due to COVID-19 infection.

The current shortage of P2 respirators (N95) for our health care workers has resulted in the use of surgical masks which do not provide adequate protection from possible infection when dealing with COVID-19 positive patients.

In the absence of P2 masks, P1 masks can be considered as a more effective option in preference to surgical and cloth masks to protect our health care workers.

In the present situation, where the supply of P2 respirators is scarce, individuals who are at high risk of exposure to COVID-19 should use a P1 respirator (if a P2 is not available) which will provide them with a level of protection much greater than a surgical mask or a “cloth” mask.

The AIOH considers treating patients who may potentially be infected with the COVID-19 virus as a high risk of exposure.

Whether a P1 or P2 is used, optimum protection is only achieved when there is an effective seal against the face. Therefore, the individual needs to be clean shaven, to have passed a respirator fit test, and trained to don and safely remove the respirator. All used respirators should be treated as potential contaminated waste and disposed of as such.

It should be noted that only P1 or P2 respirators that comply with AS/NZS 1716 and are clearly labelled to conform to this standard should be used.

The AIOH does not condone the use of P1 or P2 respirators for individuals at low risk of infection, such as members of the public.

To reduce the likelihood of community transmission of the COVID-19 virus, members of the public should continue to follow good hygiene practices and comply with current physical distancing and quarantine guidelines.

In summary, the AIOH strongly recommends that:

- Where P2 respirators are not available, P1 respirators should be utilised in preference to surgical and cloth masks.
- P1 respirators be distributed and utilised for frontline health workers who are at increased risk of infection due to their physical interaction with COVID-19 positive patients, and
- ensure recipients are fit tested and trained to wear and dispose of respirators correctly.

For further details, contact Andrew Orfanos, AIOH President 2020

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