

Presently there is a global shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE). The Australian Government has provided a limited supply of surgical masks to PHNs for distribution to general practices and community pharmacies with a demonstrated need. **PHNs do not have other PPE for distribution.**

To help conserve supply, we ask that practices and pharmacies use the masks only when needed. [Government guidelines](#) state that surgical masks are:

- For the protection of health professionals and practice/pharmacy staff in direct contact with people presenting with fever and/or respiratory symptoms including cough, sore throat and/or shortness of breath
- For provision to people who are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, for the protection of other patients and staff, and of the public while the patient returns home.

There is no need for the general public or health workers to wear masks **unless** they are dealing with symptomatic patients.

Generally, requesting providers will be allocated **one box (50 masks) per practice or community pharmacy.**

For routine primary care procedures, including specimen collection, surgical masks are considered to be effective. When specimen collection is undertaken they should be worn with other PPE as appropriate (gown, gloves and eye protection). P2/N95 respirators are only required for aerosol generating procedures or where there is uncontrolled coughing.

We ask that practices and pharmacies use masks sparingly and in accordance with guidelines. If we run out of masks, this will impact heavily on the ability of practices across our catchment to function properly.

It is important to remember that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or tiredness are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness rather than coronavirus.

### **New bulk billed MBS telehealth services**

There will soon be a new bulk billed MBS telehealth service available for doctors, nurses and mental health professionals to deliver services via telehealth. The new MBS items will allow people to access essential health services in their home while they undergo self-isolation or quarantine, and reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for vulnerable people in the community. A [fact sheet](#) has been published, and details will be communicated when available.

Other Australian Government resources are here:

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-national-health-plan-resources>