COVID-19 and PPE

The SSTUWA position is that under the *OSH Act* and or its equivalent the employer must provide staff with appropriate PPE to manage the risk of infecting CVOID-19 whilst at work.

The current *OSH Act, 1984,* (WA) states:

> Section 19*. Duties of employers*
>
> *(1) An employer shall, so far as is practicable, provide and maintain a working environment in which the employees of the employer (the employees) are not exposed to hazards and in particular, but without limiting the generality of the foregoing, an employer shall —*
>
> > ***(d) where it is not practicable to avoid the presence of hazards at the workplace, provide the employees with, or otherwise provide for the employees to have, such adequate personal protective clothing and equipment as is practicable to protect them against those hazards, without any cost to the employees.***

DoE has stated they will ensure schools have appropriate masks and sufficient hand sanitiser.

Masks:

P2/N95 masks are currently the most effective in protecting staff. If P2/N95 masks are not available, the next best type of mask is a surgical mask with appropriate fitting and measures to improve the seal around the nose and mouth to reduce the risk of infection.1

The following should be considered for the use of surgical masks, which includes some advice on how to improve the seal around the nose and mouth[2]:

Brace – Use a brace, for example: one made from three rubber bands that you link together with the centre band spread over your surgical mask to hold the surgical mask against your face and the other bands on each side loop over your ears to help create a better seal.

Double masking – Wearing a tight-fitting cloth mask over your surgical mask will hold the surgical mask against your face and help create a seal.

Knot and tuck – Tying/knotting the sides of your surgical mask and tucking and folding the excess fabric inside the knot and smoothing out the fabric to be flat against your face pulls the mask closer to your face and reduces air leaking in or out.

Toggles – Adjustment toggles on the loops of your surgical mask can be used to pull the mask tighter to your head. You can also connect the loops together behind your head with a clip or ear saver device if your surgical mask does not have toggles.

This short video demonstrates appropriate fitting of P2/N95 masks and demonstrates the hacks to improve the effectiveness of surgical masks:

Hand sanitiser:

DoE currently has supplies of hand sanitiser, and this should be within schools for staff and students to use. The hand sanitiser is an effective control measure regarding transmission by touch and is to be used in conjunction with regular hand washing.[3] There is much documentation and information available on how to hand wash and use hand sanitiser.[4] Reminding staff of how to hand wash and use hand sanitiser correctly at staff meetings, etc through practical demonstrations or videos should be considered.

Staff should be encouraged to wash their hands regularly and use hand sanitiser in between, when they cannot hand wash. Students should also be encouraged to hand wash after returning from breaks and use hand sanitiser when required. Hand

sanitiser should also become a part of one's mask wearing routine.[5]

Resolution of COVID-19 WHS matters:

If staff are not being provided with masks and/or hand sanitiser is not available, the SSTUWA advises to follow the Occupational Safety and Health Issue Resolution Process as outlined in the DoE health and safety policy/procedures.[6]

Please also liaise with your school organiser and/or the WHS organiser at the SSTUWA if you need to enact this process to resolve risks regarding masks and hand sanitiser at your school. Reach them at (08) 9210 6000 or contact@sstuwa.org.au

[1] **https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S019665532100715X**

[2] **We urgently need better masks (respirators), *OzSage*, 31/1/22**

[3] **https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public**

[4] **https://www.health.gov.au/health-alerts/covid-19/protect-yourself-and-others**

[5] **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEIYCvcOHLw**

[6] **Occupational Safety and Health Procedures (D18/0019186), *DoE*, 16/4/19.**

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