
COVID-19, PPE and Second Stage of Labor: Current US Guidance

NOTE: Information and guidelines may change rapidly. Check in with listed references in 'Learn More – Primary Sources' to best keep up to date

SUMMARY:

Multiple societies and experts have weighed in on whether second stage of labor and delivery warrants respirators (e.g., N95 masks) vs surgical masks in the setting of a patient with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. The lack of clarity currently revolves around whether the second stage of labor should be considered an aerosol-generating event. ACOG, SMFM and multiple other ObGyn societies have sent a letter to the CDC requesting clarification (summarized under 'Key Points' below).

CDC

- CDC advises healthcare personnel to use
 - Gloves
 - Gowns
 - Airborne precautions
 - Eye protection (e.g., goggles or a face shield)
- Face masks are an acceptable alternative when the supply chain of N95 respirators (or similar respirators that filter inspired air and offer respiratory protection) cannot meet the demand
- NIOSH-approved filtering facepiece respirators, half facepiece or full facepiece elastomeric respirators, and powered air-purifying respirators (PAPRs) where feasible "might be considered"
 - However, they should not be used during surgery because exhaled air may contaminate the sterile field
- If respirators are in short supply, priority should be given to aerosol-generating procedures (e.g., intubation)
- CDC addresses alternatives in the setting of face mask shortages on the page entitled Strategies for Optimizing the Supply of Facemasks (see 'Learn More – Primary Sources')

- CDC guidance states

Based on limited data, forceful exhalation during the second stage of labor would not be expected to generate aerosols to the same extent as procedures more commonly considered to be aerosol generating (such as bronchoscopy, intubation, and open suctioning)

Forceful exhalation during the second stage of labor is not considered an aerosol-generating procedure for respirator prioritization during shortages over procedures more likely to generate higher concentrations of infectious respiratory aerosols

When the supply chain is restored, facilities with a respiratory protection program should return to use of respirators for patients with known or suspected COVID-19

ACOG

- Healthcare providers should use PPE, including respirators or face masks, goggles, gowns and gloves | N95 respirators should be used for aerosol-generating procedures
- ACOG states that “COVID-19 infection is highly contagious, and this must be taken into consideration when planning intrapartum care”
- In addition to wearing appropriate PPE, respirators (e.g., N95 masks) should be worn by “All medical staff caring for potential or confirmed COVID-19 patients” when available

SMFM/SOAP

- Respirators (N95 masks)
 - Should be used in any room where there is performance or anticipation of aerosol-generating procedure for patient with confirmed COVID-19 or PUI
 - Examples of potential aerosol-generating events include
 - Cesarean deliveries
 - PPH
 - Intubation
- Second stage of labor
 - Suggestions to limit exposure include
 - Use of surgical drapes as an added barrier during second stage and delivery | Check with local infection control regarding reuse of N95 masks
 - In addition, SMFM/SOAP believes it is “reasonable” to

...consider N95 mask use for HCWs caring for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 in the second stage of labor, including specifically HCWs with significant and prolonged

exposure to such patients

As with all resource considerations and potential supply and demand imbalances, the ability to adhere to this suggestion will need to be evaluated on an institutional level. It is acknowledged that this suggestion is above and beyond current CDC recommendations

SOGH

- The SOGH COVID-19 statement is based on the following
 - Obstetricians are frontline personnel
 - Asymptomatic patients on L&D can potentially infect frontline personnel, especially as there is close contact between patients and healthcare professionals during labor
 - The science behind COVID-19 transmission continues to evolve
- As a result of the above, SOGH recommends

Universal use of hospital masks on Labor and Delivery, for staff, patients and visitors

Universal testing for Covid19 of all pregnant women and their chosen support person/s on Labor and Delivery, where available

Use of full PPE, including N95 masks and face shields, for the second stage of labor for all Covid positive women and persons under investigation or for all women, when universal testing is not available

KEY POINTS:

Letter to CDC Requesting Clarification

- Sent jointly from the following societies
 - AAGL | ACNM | ACOG | ASRM | AUGS | AWHONN | NANPWH | SMFM | SFP | SGS
- The letter requests clarification from the CDC regarding PPE use on L&D, specifically second stage of labor
- The societies raise concern that the current CDC recommendations are

...being interpreted as suggesting that obstetric care clinicians need not wear N95 masks and face shields when attending to patients with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 during the second stage of labor

We appreciate your clarification that the CDC recommends use of such PPE and look

forward to working with you to amplify this message

'Expert Review' (Boelig et al. AJOG MFM, 2020)

- Some centers consider N95 masks to be appropriate
 - In addition to droplet precaution PPE for any patients with suspected or confirmed COVID and
 - For any patient, regardless of respiratory symptoms, during indispensable aerosolizing procedures, including second stage of labor

Learn More - Primary Sources:

[CDC: Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) in Healthcare Settings](#)

[CDC: Clinical Questions about COVID-19: Questions and Answers](#)

[Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine and Society for Obstetric and Anesthesia and Perinatology – Labor and Delivery COVID-19 Considerations](#)

[ACOG COVID-19 FAQs for Obstetrician-Gynecologists, Obstetrics](#)

[Labor and Delivery Guidance for COVID-19 \(Boelig et al. AJOG MFM, 2020\)](#)

[Letter From Professional ObGyn Societies to the CDC](#)

[SOGH COVID-19 Position Statement](#)

[The Right Mask for the Task](#)

<https://www.obgproject.com/2020/03/31/covid-19-ppe-and-second-stage-of-labor-current-us-guidance/>