



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
Aging and Long-Term Support Administration
PO Box 45600, Olympia, Washington 98504-5600

November 7, 2024

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ALTSA: ALF #2024-038
ALTSA: CCRSS #2024-032
ALTSA: ESF #2024-035
ALTSA: ICF/IID #2024-024
ALTSA: NH #2024-055

**RESPIRATORY PROTECTION AGAINST AIRBORNE DISEASES
AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS**

Dear Provider/Administrator/Superintendent:

Respiratory Illness Season is here. Now is the time to review your infection prevention and control (IPC) system and how you will protect your residents/clients and employees from respiratory illnesses. Respiratory protection refers to the practices and tools used to prevent or control respiratory illnesses. This includes the use of masks and respirators when needed.

All long-term care (LTC) settings are expected to adhere to the recognized IPC standards and recommendations provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC recommends the use of [Standard Precautions](#) (SP) and [Transmission-Based Precautions](#) (TBP) in all healthcare settings. The guidelines can be reviewed by following the links in this letter.

In Transmission-Based Precautions (TBP) guidelines, the CDC recommends the use of TBP/Airborne Precautions for certain suspected or confirmed respiratory virus illnesses, such as COVID-19, measles, and tuberculosis. A list of some common pathogens and recommended TBP type and duration for the pathogens can be found in the CDC's [Appendix A](#).

When implementing TBP/Airborne Precautions, the CDC recommends healthcare personnel use a **NIOSH approved, fit-tested respirator** for all encounters of suspected or confirmed airborne illnesses that can spread when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. Washington State Labor & Industries (L&I) requires employers to have a written Respiratory Protection Program (RPP) wherever employees are required to wear a respirator in the workplace ([WAC 296-842/Respirators](#)). This means when LTC settings implement the CDC recommendations for TBP/Airborne, they will:

- Have a written RPP that includes:
 - A designated RPP administrator;
 - A respiratory hazard assessment;
 - When respirators will be used and who will be required to wear them; and
 - Records of staff required to wear a respirator, including:
 - Medical evaluations for respirator use;
 - Respirator use training; and
 - Fit-testing record.

RCS encourages LTC providers to be familiar with CDC IPC guidance to develop and maintain an IPC system that protects residents/clients from communicable diseases. RCS regulators will continue to review your setting's IPC system during all regular inspections, surveys, evaluations, and IPC related complaints. This review may include observations, interviews, and record reviews related to the application of Standard and Transmission-Based Precautions. When your setting implements TBP/Airborne, regulators will request to review your written RPP to assure

ALTSA Provider Letter: RESPIRATORY PROTECTION AGAINST AIRBORNE DISEASES AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

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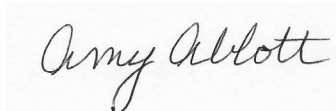
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compliance with the use of NIOSH approved, fit-tested respirators for your staff. If during an inspection/investigation RCS determines the provider is not in compliance with TBP/Airborne, RCS will cite under the IPC regulations within our purview and make a referral to L&I for RPP compliance issues.

For more information about RPP for LTC settings, please visit the [Department of Health RPP webpage](#). You may also request a consultation with the [Washington State Department of Labor and Industries](#) to review your RPP and ask questions.

Thank you for your continued focus and commitment to protect the health and safety of your residents/clients. If you have questions, please contact the Residential Care Services IPC team at ipc.epteam@dshs.wa.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Abbott". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Amy Abbott, Director
Residential Care Services

DSHS: *"Partnering with People"*