

MEDIA RELEASE

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Anaesthetists Welcome Progress in PPE Fit-Testing Campaign

The Australian Society of Anaesthetists (ASA) has welcomed news that Queensland Health will introduce a respiratory protection program that will include fit-testing of P2/N95 masks and urges other states and territories to follow this lead.

The ASA has been calling for fit-testing to be mandated for healthcare workers since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and has released a series of posters with information for health staff if their employers refuse to provide fit-testing. ASA President Dr Suzi Nou said this is just the latest step in the society's campaign to improve health and safety issues for frontline workers.

"We have been vocal in our fight to protect healthcare workers with a strong focus on fit-testing especially for anaesthetists involved in high-risk procedures such as intubation," Dr Nou said. "The progress happening in Queensland and the trial announced in Victoria last week show we are heading in the right direction. We just need to move there faster if we want to protect the lives of our healthcare workers, patients and the community."

The ASA has released a Position Statement on Fit-Testing for Adequate Respiratory Protection endorsed by the Australian Institute of Health & Safety (AIHS) and Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists (AIOH) which recommends:

- All health services be mandated to provide health workers in contact with patients with COVID-19 with adequate respiratory protection. This includes a fit tested N95/P2 respirator as a minimum and is in accordance with the National Guidelines and Australian Standards, except where State guidance recommends a higher level of PPE.
- Health workers should not undertake or be required to undertake tasks requiring PPE in situations where appropriately fit-tested and checked PPE is not available for use. Any such tasks should not proceed until required PPE is made available.
- In ensuring adequate PPE, fit-testing is essential to ensure P2/N95 respirators will provide adequate protection. Training as to their correct use should be provided and fit-checking must be performed with each individual mask application.
- Where fit-testing is not available, alternatives methods of protection are to be implemented (e.g. PAPRs).
- All anaesthetists must undertake training until they are proficient in the donning and doffing of PPE and team-based simulation for protected intubation and extubation as a minimum.

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The ASA, with more than 3,700 members, is the peak body and leading representative of anaesthetists in Australia. Since 1934 the ASA has been supporting, representing and educating anaesthetists to ensure the safest high-quality patient care.