



February 6, 2024

Yaneer Bar-Yam
Co-founder
World Health Network
Via email: yaneer@necsi.edu

Dear Yaneer Bar-Yam:

Thank you for your additional letters, dated September 26, 2023, October 31, 2023, and January 29, 2024, regarding updates to CDC's *Isolation Precautions: Preventing Transmission of Infectious Agents in Healthcare Settings*.

We appreciate the thoughtful comments that you and your group have provided. After multiple discussions with partners and other impacted groups, on January 23, 2024, CDC sent comments and questions to the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC) and its Isolation Precautions Guideline Workgroup for additional discussion and technical consideration on the draft of part one of the *2024 Guideline to Prevent Transmission of Pathogens in Healthcare Settings*. Specifically, CDC sent questions to HICPAC and the workgroup regarding source control, N95 respirator and mask use, voluntary respirator use, and the new, proposed transmission-by-air categories.

As you mentioned, CDC has provided additional detail about what is being reviewed, the work CDC is doing to immediately expand the scope of technical backgrounds of participants in the workgroup and among the committee members, as well as the next steps for returning the guidelines to CDC for eventual posting in the *Federal Register* to request public input.¹ The public comment period is used to gather input for all guidelines produced by HICPAC and provides an opportunity for all groups and individuals to submit comments for review.

Although the 2007 Isolation Precautions Guideline² has been updated periodically, CDC has received feedback that the document is not easily accessible or convenient for many of those who need it, and some recommendations can be misinterpreted. For these reasons, CDC requested that HICPAC review and update the guideline to reflect the latest data and current practices in medical care delivery. The goal of the revision is to provide a guideline that is effective, practical to use, safe, and understandable.

The first section of the updated guideline is focused on the core concepts of how pathogens spread in healthcare settings and provides high-level summaries of personal protective

¹ <https://blogs.cdc.gov/safehealthcare/draft-2024-guideline-to-prevent-transmission-of-pathogens-in-healthcare-settings/>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/guidelines/isolation/index.html>

equipment that healthcare workers can use to prevent or minimize the spread of infections. The first section will not include any recommendations for the types of precautions that should be used for specific pathogens. Pathogen-specific recommendations will be included in the second section, and those will be reviewed and updated starting this year.

HICPAC formed a workgroup composed of external experts and working partners, including frontline healthcare providers, infection prevention specialists, and industrial hygiene experts, that has been working on the draft of the first section since February 2022. CDC continues to regularly review the composition of workgroups to ensure that they include members with broad and relevant expertise. The workgroup also engages experts from outside HICPAC, including external experts, to present and provide input on specific topics as needed.³ In addition, the workgroup seeks input from CDC subject matter experts for consultation or informational presentations that contribute to the workgroup's activities. Such consultation or information presentations by CDC staff are transparent and evident to minimize the risk of, or the appearance of, undue influence that would compromise the independence of the workgroup.

Regarding the composition of the larger committee, the topics HICPAC covers are very broad. Currently, CDC has ongoing work on guidance for neonatal intensive care units, dental water lines, occupational health, and surveillance via the National Healthcare Safety Network. For this reason, agency leadership has primarily focused on identifying experts with broad expertise for membership on the committee. The membership of HICPAC is reviewed annually, and there will continue to be opportunities to adjust the expertise available to the committee based on its current work.

CDC will continue to provide updates on the progress of the workgroup and HICPAC discussions on the HICPAC website⁴ and will publish written comments received during HICPAC meetings. CDC's HICPAC website has also been updated to address questions about the guideline development process.^{5,6}

As HICPAC works through the entire guideline review, it is important to remember that the agency and committee have every patient and healthcare worker in mind. This includes environmental services staff, respiratory therapists, administrative staff, nurses, and everyone else whose efforts help patients and residents receive the safe care they need.

In conjunction with interagency partners, CDC will continue to consider the best available science, current conditions, and input from various groups to inform our guidelines. We appreciate your input and look forward to continued dialogue.

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/hicpac/pdf/2023-August-IPGWG-508.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/hicpac/index.html>

⁵ HICPAC Guideline Development Process. <https://www.cdc.gov/hicpac/development-process.html>

⁶ HICPAC Isolation Precautions Guideline Update blog posts. <https://www.cdc.gov/hicpac/IPGU-Blog-Posts.html>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel B. Jernigan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Daniel Jernigan, MD, MPH
Director, National Center for Emerging and
Zoonotic Infectious Diseases, CDC