

## PERSONAL APPEARANCE

1. **PURPOSE:** To establish policy, procedures, and responsibilities for employee attire, personal hygiene, and grooming in the Alaska VA Healthcare System's professional health care environment.
2. **POLICY:** Customer service begins with personal appearance. Each employee's personal appearance reflects on the Alaska VA's standards and contributes to the overall image of the organization as a provider of high quality health care. It is the policy of the Alaska VA that employees wear appropriate clothing suitable to a professional health care environment and maintain standards of personal hygiene and grooming that promote safety and enhance infection prevention. New employees shall be furnished a copy of this policy during their New Employee Orientation.
3. **RESPONSIBILITIES:**
  - a. **Director:** May allow deviations from this policy based upon facility-wide activities.
  - b. **Supervisors:** Responsible for ensuring these standards of personal appearance are observed by employees in the work environment. Service Chiefs may allow short-term deviations from this policy to allow for moving, office cleaning and organizing, etc.
  - c. **Employees:** Responsible for observing good personal hygiene, wearing clean clothing, and maintaining a well-groomed appearance at all times. Employees are responsible for compliance with the guidelines contained in this policy. Cleanliness and good grooming are an important part of providing the best in patient care. Appropriate accommodations based on religious, ethnic, or cultural requirements may be made, provided they do not result in an undue hardship for the facility, e.g., create a safety concern.
4. **PROCEDURES:**
  - a. In our work environment, each employee's personal appearance should exemplify professionalism, competence, and moderation. The selection of clothing and accessories for the work environment should promote patient confidence in staff professionalism and not draw undue attention to individuals because of their attire.
  - b. Services (e.g., Surgical, Primary Care, Facility Maintenance, etc.) with uniforms, scrubs, and/or personal protective equipment provisions will inform employees of these special requirements at new employee service-level orientations and at staff meetings.
  - c. Employees required to wear uniforms should wear the approved uniform while in duty status. Employees not required to wear a uniform must wear clothes suitable for their work environment.

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d. The following guidelines are provided for clothing, accessories, and personal hygiene. In the aggregate, these guidelines create an appropriate standard for personal appearance in our work environment.

(1) CLOTHING:

(a) Clothing should be clean, in good repair, and properly fitted.

(b) Clothing that is tight, shirts that are low cut, or revealing, are considered inappropriate dress and are not permitted in the workplace.

(c) Shoes appropriate to your work environment must be worn and should be viewed as protection for employee's feet. Medically prescribed orthopedic/podiatry footwear, as approved by the supervisor, may be allowed if the wearing of such footwear does not present a safety or health issue for the employee, other employees or patients. Employees must be able to respond to any emergency situation without placing themselves at risk, therefore, managers have the discretion to ask for footwear to be changed immediately if deemed unsuitable for the task or location of the task. Examples of this may include: The wearing of 'flip flops', other open-toed/open-backed shoes or shoes with high heels (over 3 inches) within a clinical setting and if providing direct patient care is considered inappropriate foot attire. In all areas of the facility, flip flops are considered inappropriate as they do not demonstrate professional attire.

(d) T-shirts with logos or inappropriate language, sweat suits, warm-ups, shorts, legging(s) (unless worn with a skirt/dress), and dresses or skirts over 2 inches above the knee are not appropriate.

(e) Clothing with offensive language or slogans is inappropriate.

(2) ACCESSORIES:

(a) For staff engaged in routine, direct interactions with patients, hats, caps and head covers should not be worn while on duty unless part of a uniform, safety/sanitation gear, or religious attire.

(b) Identification badges must be worn above the waist at all times and the employee's name and photograph must be clearly visible.

(c) Sunglasses or dark eyeglasses should not be worn inside the facility unless prescribed by a physician for indoor wear.

(d) Excessive wearing of jewelry or body piercings which create undue attention to an individual is inappropriate. Jewelry should enhance our professional healthcare environment. Direct patient care staff should minimize use of jewelry to promote infection prevention and safety. Employees required to operate machinery should avoid dangling earrings and long beads/necklaces.

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(e) Personal items placed on the ear(s) such as headphones, ear jacks, and cellular phones, etc., shall not be worn while on duty in direct patient care areas. These items should only be used while on duty with supervisory permission.

(3) PERSONAL HYGIENE:

(a) Employees must maintain good personal hygiene.

(b) Hair must be clean and well groomed. In patient care areas, employees should ensure that hair length and style do not interfere with performance of duties; facial hair should be neat, clean and well-trimmed. Toupees, wigs, and hair extensions should appear professional and natural.

(c) Nails must be clean and maintained at a length which does not interfere with the performance of duties or operations of equipment. All health care or other staff who may provide hands-on care, and food service workers must follow these guidelines from NM 118-11; Required Hand Hygiene practices:

1. All health care workers who provide direct, hands-on care to Veterans are not allowed to wear artificial fingernails which may be described as molded forms, extenders/tips, fiberglass, silk wraps or acrylic powder-liquid mixture applications over nails. Other staff included may be non-supervisory and supervisory personnel who regularly or occasionally provide direct, hands-on care to Veterans. The length of the natural nail must not exceed ¼ inch. For those individuals described above who are NOT working in the ASU/OR, or food service (see 'i.' page 5,) nail polish may be applied to existing, natural nails, but must be up-kept so as not to show cracks, chips or peeling.

2. VHA food service workers practice appropriate hand hygiene as they perform their duties. For example, use of soap and water only is required rather than alcohol-based hand rubs in food preparation settings. Food service workers are strictly required to wash their hands and fingernails with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after using the restroom. Food service personnel are not allowed to wear any type of artificial nails and should not wear nail polish. Length of nails should not exceed 1/8 inch. (See VA Handbook 1109.04, for additional information).

(d) Excessive use of cosmetics, perfumes, and fragrances may cause severe allergic reactions to patients and other staff members and should be avoided.

(e) Infection prevention requires that all employees wash their hands before leaving the rest room.

APPROPRIATE	INAPPROPRIATE
<b>SLACKS</b>	<b>SLACKS</b>
Khakis or corduroys	
Dockers	Sweatpants, leggings, exercise wear
Jeans (must be clean and free of rips, tears and fraying; may not be excessively tight or revealing)	Shorts, low-rise or hip-hugger pants or jeans
Skorts, Capris- length between the Knee and the Ankle or ankle length.	
<b>SHIRTS</b>	<b>SHIRTS</b>
Polo collar knit or golf shirts	Shirts with logos or inappropriate language (other than VA logo)
Oxford shirts	T-Shirts or sweatshirts
VA logo wear	Beachwear
Short-sleeve blouses or shirts	Exercise wear
Turtlenecks	Crop tops, clothing showing midriffs, spaghetti straps
Blazers or sport coats	
Jackets or sweaters	
<b>SHOES</b>	<b>SHOES</b>
Boating or deck shoes, moccasins	Sandals, thongs, flip flops, open-toe shoes.
Casual, low-heel, open-back shoes (e.g., mules, sling backs, tennis shoes, Croc-like sandals.)	
Oxfords	

e. The intent of this policy is to promote a professional healthcare environment that enhances infection prevention, safety, and provides a positive image to our customers. Employees who do not comply with these guidelines (without appropriate justification) may be considered “not ready for duty” and may be subject to disciplinary action(s) when appropriate.

f. Addressing workplace attire and hygiene problems: Violations of this policy can range from inappropriate clothing items to offensive perfumes and body odor. If a staff member comes to work in inappropriate dress, the staff member will be required to go home, change into conforming attire or properly groom, and return to work. The employee will not be paid for the time they are away from the workplace. If a staff member’s poor hygiene or use of too much perfume/cologne is an issue, the supervisor should discuss the problem with the staff member in private and should point out the specific areas to be corrected. If the problem persists, supervisors should follow the normal corrective action process.

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5. **REFERENCES:**

AVAHS Behavioral Expectations and Commitments; September 11, 2007.  
Hand Hygiene Requirements, AVAHS Numbered Memorandum 118-11, dated April 4, 2011.  
VA Pamphlet 05-68, DVA and AFGE/NVAC Master Agreement, dated March 2011.

6. **RESCISSIONS:** Numbered Memorandum 05-11, dated March 1, 2013.

7. **OFFICE OF RESPONSIBILITY:** Human Resources Management Service (05).

8. **EXPIRATION DATE:** Three years from the date of issue.



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Distribution: All Employees