

Prague COVID ward staff do away with protective suits

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Doctors treating COVID patients at a Prague hospital have shed their once mandatory protective suits, claiming that bacteria clinging to their sleeves actually increased mortality.

Medical staff at the COVID ward of Prague's General University Hospital now only wear face masks, gloves and plastic aprons as [protective gear](#), despite the spread of the highly contagious Omicron variant.

"We dropped the suits a year ago, because they helped the spread of bacteria, viruses and mould among patients, which worsened the overall mortality data," Martin Balik, chief doctor at the [intensive care unit](#), told AFP on Wednesday.

Previously, doctors and nurses on the ward wore protective suits complete with plastic caps and trousers throughout their shifts.

They had to change completely when going to the bathroom or having lunch.

One of the main treatment centres in the Czech Republic for COVID patients, the [hospital](#) receives critical patients from smaller hospitals that do not have equipment needed to keep them alive.

"During the epidemic, we started to bring in patients with very resistant bacteria which we had not encountered before," said the head of the

intensive care unit, Jan Blaha.

"At one point, patient mortality increased by 6-8 percent. When our staff got vaccinated or recovered from COVID, we stopped wearing the suits and the rate fell," Blaha said.

He added the risk of contamination for staff was low as the vast majority of them are vaccinated.

Unlike many [medical facilities](#), which barred patients receiving visitors at the start of the pandemic, Prague's University Hospital has allowed visitors at COVID wards from the start of the pandemic.

Blaha said communication with the family was crucial for the doctors, who can explain what they are doing, and for the patients as well.

"Of course we perceive the influence of family and friends as very important and it is clear that it helps the treatment too," Blaha said.

The Czech Republic, an EU member of 10.7 million people, has seen more than 2.83 million confirmed COVID cases with over 37,000 deaths.

On Tuesday, the daily infection growth rate reached almost 40,000, a new record, with Omicron being the dominant strain.

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