

Ministry of Health Policy

Mask Use in Health Care Facilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Policy Objective

- This policy protects patients, clients, clinicians, health care workers, non-clinical staff and the public by outlining provincial expectations for the use of face masks in all health care facilities, programs and services, including community physician offices and outpatient clinics during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Definitions

- **Medical mask:** A medical grade face mask that meets ASTM International and ISO (or equivalent) performance requirements for bacterial filtration efficiency, particulate filtration efficiency, fluid resistance, pressure differential, flame spread, skin sensitivity and cytotoxic testing.
- **Must:** A mandatory requirement based on BC Ministry of Health directive.
- **Non-clinical staff:** All staff that are not providing clinical care including, but not limited to, administrative and office staff, facilities staff, contracted staff and volunteers.

Guiding Considerations

1. Masking guidance should be based on current evidence about the known mechanisms of COVID-19 transmission. Specifically, COVID-19 is primarily spread by liquid droplets that come from the mouth and nose when a person coughs, sneezes, and sometimes, when a person talks.
2. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including masks, are one part of the hierarchy of infection prevention and exposure control measures for communicable diseases. As such, PPE are supplemental to, and not replacements for other measures on the hierarchy. These other measures include, but are not limited to:
 - a. population-level measures (crowd limits, closures, quarantine/isolation, contact tracing),
 - b. environmental measures (physical distancing, physical barriers, cleaning and disinfection),
 - c. administrative measures (changes in work practices, decreased density), and
 - d. personal measures (staying home when sick, hand hygiene).

Policy

Long-Term Care/Seniors Assisted Living Settings

- **Health care workers and all non-clinical staff:**
 - All persons working in a Long-Term Care facility or Seniors' Assisted Living residence **must** wear a medical mask at all times, including in common areas and break rooms unless eating and/or drinking.
 - Access to additional PPE for health care workers, such as respirators, will be provided in circumstances where, based on a point of care risk assessment, a health care worker determines there is elevated risk of COVID-19 transmission through patient/resident interaction.
- **Visitors:**
 - All visitors in a Long-Term Care facility or Seniors Assisted Living residence **must** wear a medical mask at all times.

Other Health Care Facilities and Settings where Health Care is Provided

- **Health care workers and all non-clinical staff:**
 - All persons working in a clinical unit/setting or patient care area **must** wear a medical mask, including in common areas and break rooms unless eating and/or drinking.
 - Access to additional PPE for health care workers, such as respirators, will be provided in circumstances where, based on a point of care risk assessment, a health care worker determines there is elevated risk of COVID-19 transmission through patient/resident interaction.
 - All persons working in non-clinical settings **must** follow guidance for mask use in accordance with their workplace COVID-19 Safety Plan(s) required by WorkSafe BC.
- **Visitors:**
 - All visitors **must** wear a medical mask when entering and moving around any health care facility, including clinical and non-clinical areas.
 - All persons accompanying a patient in admitting/waiting areas, including Emergency Departments, **must** wear a medical mask.
- **Patients:**
 - All patients **must** wear a medical mask when entering and moving around a health care facility, including patient transport, except when requested to remove their mask by a health care professional.
 - Admitted patients **must** wear a medical mask when they leave their room.
 - Admitted patients will generally **not be required** to wear a medical mask in their rooms, with exceptions based on a health care professional's point of care risk assessment.

Implementation

- All health care facilities **must** develop guidance materials aligned with this Policy to support local implementation.
- In accordance with guidance from BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner¹, exceptions to the Policy need to be applied for people under 12 years old, people unable to wear a mask because of a health condition or physical or mental impairment, people unable to put on or remove a mask without help from another person and/or to accommodate site-specific circumstances (e.g., staff/visitor/patient masking may not be required when eating/drinking at retail food establishments or cafeterias).
- People who are able to wear a mask, but who choose not to as a matter of preference, are not exempt.
- All health care facilities **must** provide medical masks and respirators for health care workers, non-clinical staff, patients and visitors where indicated in this Policy.

¹ British Columbia Office of the Human Rights Commissioner. “A human rights approach to mask-wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic”. April 23, 2021.