



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

POLICY COMMUNIQUÉ

COMMUNIQUÉ

TO: Health Authority CEOs

TRANSMITTAL DATE: May 2, 2024

COMMUNIQUÉ #2024-02
NUMBER:

CLIFF NUMBER: 1280797

SUBJECT: Infection Prevention and Control Measures for
Preventing Viral Respiratory Illness.

DETAILS: This document outlines updated Ministry of Health
requirements for preventing and controlling viral
respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, influenza,
and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

This document replaces *Policy Communique 2023-04:
Infection Prevention and Control Measures for Viral
Respiratory Illness Season (October 13, 2023)*.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Immediately

MINISTRY CONTACT: Brian Sagar, Executive Director, Communicable
Disease Prevention and Control, Population and
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Stephen Brown
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Health

Ministry of Health Policy

Infection Prevention and Control Measures For Preventing Viral Respiratory Illness

Policy Objective and Scope

- This policy protects health care workers (clinical and non-clinical), patients, residents, clients, visitors, and the public by outlining provincial expectations for the implementation of infection prevention and control measures in health authority facilities, programs, and services, including outpatient clinics and ambulatory care settings.

Definitions

- **Medical mask:** A medical grade face mask that meets American Society for Testing and Materials International (ASTM), International Organization for Standardization (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 health care workers that are not providing clinical care, including, but not limited to, administrative and office staff, facilities staff, contractors, and volunteers.
- **Patient care area:** An area within a health care facility (including a contracted facility), hallway or lobby, which is accessible to patients, residents or clients who are there to access care or services. This includes any other location where care is provided, such as home and community care locations (including a client's home). It does not include locations such as administrative areas or private offices which are not generally accessed by patients, residents, or clients.
- **Respirator:** A medical grade particulate filtering facepiece authorized by Health Canada, which meets minimum performance certification requirements, including for fit testing, filter efficiency, and breathing resistance (e.g., N95 respirator).
- **Should:** A recommended practice to be implemented at the discretion of the organization or the individual.

Guiding Considerations

1. This guidance is based on current evidence about the known mechanisms for transmitting viral respiratory illnesses. Specifically, viral respiratory illnesses (e.g., COVID-19, influenza, respiratory syncytial virus) are primarily spread by liquid droplets that come from the mouth and nose when a person coughs, sneezes, and sometimes, when a person talks.
2. The use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including masks, is one part of the hierarchy of infection prevention and exposure control measures for communicable diseases. As such, PPE is supplemental to, and not a replacement for other measures on the hierarchy which include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Public health measures (e.g., Orders from the Provincial Health Officer, testing).
 - b. Environmental measures (e.g., being outdoors, suitable ventilation, frequent cleaning, and disinfection).
 - c. Administrative measures (e.g., screening for symptoms and risk factors, appropriate signage, patient scheduling, sick leave policies).
 - d. Personal measures (e.g., rigorous hand hygiene, respecting personal space, staying home when sick, practicing respiratory etiquette, and ensuring immunizations are up-to-date).

Policy

1. Long-Term Care, Private Hospitals, Stand Alone Extended Care Hospitals Designated Under the Hospital Act, Seniors' Assisted Living Settings, and Provincial Mental Health Facilities.

Masking:

Health care workers (clinical and non-clinical staff):

- All persons working in Long-Term Care, Private Hospitals, Stand Alone Extended Care Hospitals Designated Under the Hospital Act, Seniors' Assisted Living Settings and Provincial Mental Health Facilities **must** wear a medical mask and other PPE (e.g., respirator) where indicated by a point-of-care risk assessment that considers all occupational risks, including potential viral respiratory illness, or as directed by a medical health officer, or as required by workplace communicable disease safety plans.
- Access to additional PPE for health care workers, such as respirators, **must** be provided in circumstances where, based on a point of care risk assessment, a health care worker determines there is elevated risk of viral respiratory illness transmission through patient/resident interaction.

Visitors:

- In routine circumstances, visitors **should** wear a medical mask based on personal choice.
- Visitors **must** wear a medical mask and other PPE when directed by a health care professional.

Residents:

- In routine circumstances, residents **should** wear a medical mask based on personal choice.
- Residents **must** wear a medical mask and other PPE when directed by a health care professional.

Ambassadors:

- Ambassadors are **not** required at health care facility entrances, unless directed by a medical health officer.
- Appropriate signage **must** be posted at all health facility entrances to direct all people to self-screen for symptoms of viral respiratory and gastrointestinal illness prior to entry.

Hand Hygiene:

- Facility operators **must** have alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) available at the entrances to facilities and at the point-of-care.
- Facility operations **must** post appropriate signage at facility entrances, in washrooms, and in common areas directing people to clean their hands.
- Health care workers **must** perform rigorous hand hygiene in accordance with the moments of hand hygiene.

Immunization:

- Health care workers **must** meet immunization requirements in accordance with Provincial Health Officer (PHO) Orders and employer policies.
- Proof-of-vaccination is **not** required for patients, clients, residents, or visitors.

Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection:

- Facility operations **must** continue enhanced cleaning and disinfection procedures in patient rooms, treatment rooms, and at high-touch points, available at <https://picnet.ca/wp-content/uploads/British-Columbia-Best-Practices-for-Environmental-Cleaning-for-Prevention-and-Control-of-Infections-in-All-Healthcare-Settings-and-Programs.pdf> (see Appendix H-10, page 121).

Health Care Worker Illness and Return to Work:

- Health care workers **must** follow provincial viral respiratory illness exposure and return-to-work guidance, available at <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/covid-19-care/Return-to-work-management-exposures-health-care-workers>. This includes self-monitoring for signs and symptoms of illness prior to work and staying home when sick.

Visitation:

- Unless directed by a medical health officer, viral respiratory illness testing (e.g., COVID-19 rapid antigen testing) is **not** required for visitation.
- Unless directed by a medical health officer, limits on the number of visitors in Long-Term Care, Private Hospitals, Stand Alone Extended Care Hospitals Designated Under the Hospital Act, Seniors' Assisted Living Settings and Provincial Mental Health Facilities are **not** required.

Occupancy Limits and Physical Distancing:

- Unless directed by a medical health officer, occupancy limits and physical distancing are **not** required as infection prevention and control measures in waiting rooms, meeting rooms, or communal areas.
- Facility operators **must** continue to follow all other mandated occupancy limits and requirements set out in, for example, local fire regulations.

2. Other Health Care Facilities and Settings where Health Care is Provided.

Masking:

Health care workers (clinical and non-clinical staff):

- All persons working in Other Health Care Facilities and Settings where Health Care is Provided **must** wear a medical mask and other PPE (e.g., respirator) where indicated by a point-of-care risk assessment that considers all occupational risks, including potential viral respiratory illness, or as directed by a medical health officer, or as required by workplace communicable disease safety plans.
- Access to additional PPE for health care workers, such as respirators, **must** be provided in circumstances where, based on a point of care risk assessment, a health care worker determines there is elevated risk of viral respiratory illness transmission through patient/resident interaction.

Visitors:

- In routine circumstances, visitors **should** wear a medical mask based on personal choice.

- Visitors **must** wear a medical mask and other PPE when directed by a health care professional.

Patients/Clients:

- In routine circumstances, patients and clients **should** wear a medical mask based on personal choice.
- Patients and clients **must** wear a medical mask or other PPE when directed by a health care professional.

Ambassadors:

- Ambassadors are **not** required at health care facility entrances, unless directed by a medical health officer.
- Appropriate signage **must** be posted at all health facility entrances to direct all people to self-screen for symptoms of viral respiratory and gastrointestinal illness prior to entry.

Hand Hygiene:

- Facility operators **must** have alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) available at entrances to facilities and at the point-of-care.
- Facility operations **must** post appropriate signage at facility entrances, in washrooms, and in common areas directing people to clean their hands.
- Health care workers **must** perform rigorous hand hygiene in accordance with the moments for hand hygiene.

Immunization:

- Health care workers **must** meet immunization requirements in accordance with Provincial Health Officer (PHO) Orders and employer policies.
- Proof-of-vaccination is **not** required for patients, clients, residents, or visitors.

Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection:

- Facility operations **must** continue enhanced cleaning and disinfection procedures in patient rooms, treatment rooms, and at high-touch points available at <https://picnet.ca/wp-content/uploads/British-Columbia-Best-Practices-for-Environmental-Cleaning-for-Prevention-and-Control-of-Infections-in-All-Healthcare-Settings-and-Programs.pdf> (Appendix H-10, page 121).

Health Care Worker Illness and Return to Work:

- Health care workers **must** follow provincial viral respiratory illness exposure and return-to-work guidance, available at <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/covid-19-care/Return-to-work-management-exposures-health-care-workers>. This includes self-monitoring for signs and symptoms of illness prior to work and staying home (and away

from others) when sick.

Visitation:

- Unless directed by a medical health officer, limits on the number of visitors are **not** required.
- Unless directed by a medical health officer, viral respiratory illness testing (e.g., COVID-19 rapid antigen testing) is **not** required for visitation.

Occupancy Limits and Physical Distancing:

- Unless directed by a medical health officer, occupancy limits and physical distancing are **not** required as infection prevention and control measures in waiting rooms, emergency departments, meeting rooms, and communal areas.
- Facility operators **must** continue to follow all other mandated occupancy limits and requirements set out in, for example, local fire and safety regulations.

Implementation

- All health care administrators **must** develop guidance materials aligned with this policy to support local implementation.
- Where medical masking is required, exceptions **must** be allowed without proof for the following:
 - people under 5 years old,
 - people unable to wear a mask because of a health condition or a physical or mental impairment,
 - people unable to put on or remove a mask without help from another person, and
 - people communicating with someone with a hearing or other communication impairment.
- People who are required to wear a mask and 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, respirators, and other PPE for health care workers, non-clinical staff, patients, clients, residents, and visitors where indicated in this policy.