



MINISTRY OF HEALTH  
POLICY COMMUNIQUÉ

COMMUNIQUÉ

TO: Health Authority CEOs

TRANSMITTAL DATE: August 31, 2021

COMMUNIQUÉ NUMBER: 2020-05

CLIFF NUMBER: 1202153

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

DETAILS: This document replaces the June 18, 2021 version of Communique 2020-05.

This document outlines Ministry of Health requirements for mask use by health care workers (clinical and non-clinical), patients and visitors to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 and other communicable respiratory illnesses within health care facilities.

This Policy identifies requirements for mask use in long-term care, private hospitals, extended care hospitals, seniors' assisted living settings and provincial mental health facilities, regardless of an individual's COVID-19 vaccination status. Mask requirements in other health care settings remain unchanged and will continue as before.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Immediately.

MINISTRY CONTACT: Brian Sagar, Senior Director, Communicable Disease, Population and Public Health

Stephen Brown  
Deputy Minister  
Ministry of Health

## Ministry of Health Policy

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

#### Policy Objective

- This policy protects patients, clients, health care workers (clinical and non-clinical) 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 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.

#### 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. public health measures (Orders from the Provincial Health Officer, testing, isolation, contact tracing),
  - b. environmental measures (being outdoors and frequent cleaning and disinfection),
  - c. administrative measures (screening for symptoms and risk factors, appropriate signage, patient scheduling), and

- d. personal measures (respecting personal space, staying home when sick, rigorous hand hygiene, ensuring immunizations are up to date).

## **Policy**

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

- **Health care workers (clinical and non-clinical staff):**
  - Regardless of immunization status, 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 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:**
  - Visitors, regardless of immunization status, must wear a medical mask according to the [Overview of Visitors in Long-Term Care and Seniors' Assisted Living](#).

### Other Health Care Facilities and Settings where Health Care is Provided

- **Health care workers (clinical and non-clinical staff):**
  - Regardless of immunization status, 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 Communicable Disease Plans, as 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 Commissioner,<sup>1</sup> exceptions to the policy **must** 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 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 and respirators for health care workers, non-clinical staff, patients and visitors where indicated in this policy.

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<sup>1</sup> British Columbia Office of the Human Rights Commissioner. "A human rights approach to mask-wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic". April 23, 2021.