



COVID-19 Update

Date: Monday, September 25, 2023

To: Everyone at HHS

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Subject: **Return of masking in patient care areas begins
Wednesday, September 27**

What's new

Beginning Wednesday, September 27, Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) will reinstate masking in patient care areas for staff, physicians, learners and volunteers. This change, intended to protect our patients and maintain the health of our workforce, is in line with [Public Health Ontario guidance](#) supported by the regional COVID-19 Subject Matter Experts (SME) committee and is also aligned with the plans of other Ontario hospitals.

We acknowledge that masking has posed a burden for staff, physicians, patients and visitors, and appreciate all that our teams continue to do to help keep our patients, visitors and colleagues safe. While we anticipate requiring clinical masking through the peak of the respiratory season, we intend for this to be a temporary measure.

When masking is required

Masking is mandatory for all staff, physicians and learners entering clinical areas including inpatient units, emergency departments, outpatient clinics, diagnostic and procedural areas and workstations.

When masking is not required

Non-clinical areas, such as public spaces and administrative areas, continue to be mask-friendly.

Masking is not required in areas that are not accessed by patients and where clinical activity does not occur (e.g., break rooms, meeting rooms, cafeterias and clinical conference rooms).

Reminders about masking:

- Masks will continue to be available at main entrances and on clinical units.
- Proper [hand hygiene](#) before donning and after doffing a mask is essential and required to reduce risk to staff and patients.
- Public Health Ontario supports continuous mask use which is defined as donning a mask and continuing to wear it for multiple patient encounters without donning and doffing in between patients. However, masks should be changed out if wet, damaged, visibly soiled.

We ask that everyone support staff, physicians, learners and visitors in their individual choice regarding masking in non-clinical areas.

Care of patients with suspect or confirmed COVID-19

The recommended PPE for direct care of patients with suspect or confirmed COVID-19, includes a fit-tested, seal-checked N95 respirator (or equivalent, or greater protection), eye protection, gown and gloves. A well-fitted medical mask is an acceptable alternative to the N95 (based on personal risk assessment of factors related to the HCW, patient and interaction) for the care of patients with suspect or confirmed COVID-19.

Fit-tested N95 respirators (or equivalent) should be used when an AGMP is performed or anticipated to be performed on patients with suspect or confirmed COVID-19.

Visitors, families and patients

- Visitors, families and patients are strongly encouraged to mask whenever possible (we ask that staff please assist patients and visitors with masking as needed); however, we do not expect staff or physicians to enforce this.
- Masks to optimize communication with speech and hearing impaired patients and families can be ordered by clinical leaders as needed.

- People should NOT visit if they are symptomatic.
- Patients with fever or respiratory symptoms continue to require to mask in all clinical and non-clinical settings (except their inpatient room/bed space) if tolerated. Asymptomatic patients are encouraged to mask when leaving their dedicated room/bed space for their own protection.

Where to find resources

Visit the Hub's [COVID-19](#) information page for [Clinical Resources](#). Information is also available in the Policy Library and in the [FAQ](#), *Masking changes due to rising COVID epidemiology for respiratory viral season 2023*.

These measures, like all COVID-19 policies and practices, will be subject to ongoing evaluation in relation to the spread of COVID-19 in our region and the advice of the SME group on infection prevention and control practices.

PPE requirements during outbreaks, above and beyond general masking guidelines, will be communicated by outbreak management teams when necessary.

Our continued thanks to everyone for their support of both past and new practice changes concerning COVID-19. Your commitment to the safety of our patients and colleagues is sincerely appreciated.

Sharon, Dave and Tamar