

MEMO

DATE: Tuesday, September 26, 2023

TO: Niagara Health Team

FROM: **Fiona Peacefull**, Executive Vice-President, Human Resources
Simon Akinsulie, Executive Vice-President, Practice, Clinical Support and Chief Nursing Executive
Dr. Karim Ali, Medical Director, Infection Prevention and Control and Director, Division of Infectious Diseases
Dr. Maureen Cividino, Occupational Health and Safety Physician

SUBJECT: **Updated Masking Guidelines Effective Monday October 2, 2023**

Over the past few weeks, we have seen increased circulation of COVID-19 and a rise in the number of COVID-19 outbreaks in hospital.

Beginning Monday, Oct. 2, 2023, Niagara Health (NH) will reinstate masking for patient-facing areas. 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 in line with the plans of other Ontario hospitals.

We acknowledge that masking may pose a burden for team members, patients and visitors. We intend for this to be a temporary measure as we navigate the changing epidemiology of COVID-19.

Masking will be required for all staff, physicians, volunteers, students and residents while providing patient care or service in emergency departments, urgent care centres, diagnostic and procedural areas, and outpatient clinics, including Walker Family Cancer Centre, dialysis units, neurology clinics, EVS, Spiritual Care, New Port Centre and Withdrawal Management Services, etc.

We will remain mask friendly in areas that are not accessed by patients (e.g. break rooms, meeting rooms, cafeterias and clinical conference rooms). We ask that everyone support team members, patients and visitors in their individual choice regarding masking in non-clinical areas.

At this time, there are no capacity limits on rooms as well.

Please follow NH signage and perform your point of care risk assessment (PCRA) for direct care of patients with suspect or confirmed COVID-19, including considering use of a fit-tested, seal-checked N95 respirator or equivalent, for greater protection. However, the use of a well-fitted medical mask is an acceptable alternative to the N95.

Fit-tested, seal-checked N95 respirators or equivalent should be used when an aerosol generating medical procedure (AGMP) is performed or anticipated to be performed on patients with suspect or confirmed COVID-19.

Visitors, families and patients are strongly encouraged to mask whenever possible. Team members can assist patients and visitors with masking as needed. However, we do not expect staff, physicians or volunteers to enforce this.

Patients with a fever or respiratory symptoms are recommended to mask in all clinical and non-clinical settings, if tolerated, as they would have pre-pandemic. Patients are encouraged to mask when leaving their dedicated room/bed space. Patients are not expected to wear a mask in the cafeteria with family.

Please reach out to Infection Prevention and Control or Occupational Health and Safety to answer any questions that may arise.

These measures, like all COVID-19 policies and practices, will be subject to ongoing evaluation related 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 COVID-19 outbreaks above and beyond the general masking guidelines will be communicated by the 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 teams is sincerely appreciated.