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**FROM: St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton's Executive Leadership Team**

**TO: All staff, physicians, learners and volunteers at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton**

**September 25, 2023**

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### **Mandatory masking for healthcare workers in all areas with patient facing activity**

Beginning Wednesday, September 27, St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton (SJHH) will reinstate masking for all areas with patient facing activity.

This includes:

- Patient rooms, ambulatory clinics, registration areas, patient group activity rooms, hallways in clinical areas and community visits.

In line with Public Health Ontario's guidance and supported by the regional COVID-19 Subject Matter Experts committee, this change is intended to protect patients and maintain the health of our workforce. This change is in line with many other Ontario hospitals, including Hamilton Health Sciences, who are making similar changes.

These measures will be subject to ongoing evaluation in relation to the spread of respiratory viruses in our region and the advice of the Subject Matter Expert group on infection prevention and control practices.

Our continued thanks to everyone for their support of both past and new practice changes concerning respiratory illnesses. Your commitment to the safety of our patients and teams is sincerely appreciated.

#### **When is masking required for healthcare workers?**

Masking is required for healthcare workers in areas of patient facing activities, including: Patient rooms, ambulatory clinics, registration areas, patient group activity rooms, hallways in clinical areas, and community visits.

Masking continues to be encouraged in all other clinical and non-clinical areas.

#### **When is masking not mandatory for healthcare workers?**

Masking continues to be encouraged but is not mandatory in the following scenarios:

- Care desk (Communication/Nursing Station), break rooms, staff lounges, meeting rooms, auditoriums, laboratory, offices, shuttle, and charting rooms. HCWs are reminded there is no eating/drinking, except for water, at the care desk, based on healthcare regulation.
- Common non-clinical areas such as hallways in non-clinical areas, elevators, lobbies, Tim Hortons and cafeterias (regardless of potential transient encounters with patients in these settings).

### **Care of patients with suspect or confirmed COVID-19**

N95 respirators will only be required during AGMPs for COVID-positive patients or patients with suspected COVID. HCWs can still use N95s in other scenarios based on their Point of Care Risk Assessment (PCRA).

### **Are visitors, families and patients required to wear a mask?**

Visitors, families and patients are encouraged to mask whenever possible. Staff can assist patients and visitors with masking as needed, however, we do not expect any HCW to enforce this. Masks will continue to be available at hospital entrances and on units/clinics.

Patients are strongly encouraged to mask in the emergency department, Urgent Care Centre, Labour and Delivery Triage, and outpatient settings (particularly in waiting rooms). Patients can remove their mask once inside the clinic/examination room.

Visitors are strongly encouraged to mask in settings where they are in contact with patients, both in inpatient, outpatient and emergency settings (i.e. waiting rooms, patient rooms, dialysis units, urgent care centre and in the emergency department). Visitors should not visit if symptomatic.

Visitors are asked to respect patient wishes and put on a mask if requested.

Visitors, essential caregivers, and support people are not permitted to enter the hospital if they have COVID-19 symptoms. Visitors must complete the self-assessment before entering the hospital. Those who do not pass the self-assessment are asked to refrain from visiting the hospital for 10 days from onset of symptoms/positive COVID test.

### **Are there any instances when patients are required to wear a mask?**

Patients with fever or respiratory symptoms are required to mask in all clinical and non-clinical settings (except their inpatient room/bed space), as they would have pre-pandemic. Patients are encouraged to mask when leaving their dedicated room/bedspace for their own protection.

### **I'm a leader and I have some additional questions**

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