

**From:** HHS News <[HHSNews@HHSC.CA](mailto:HHSNews@HHSC.CA)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 01, 2024 10:05 AM  
**To:** EveryoneHHS <[everyoneHHS@HHSC.CA](mailto:everyoneHHS@HHSC.CA)>  
**Subject:** Internal Memo: HHS moves to de-escalate universal masking requirements



**Date:** Thursday, February 1, 2024  
**To:** Everyone at HHS  
**From:** Sharon Pierson, EVP, Clinical Operations, COO and CNE  
Dave McCaig, EVP, Corporate Affairs and CFO  
Dr. Tamar Packer, EVP, Academic and CME  
**Subject:** **HHS moves to de-escalate universal masking requirements**

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## What's new

Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) is taking a first step to de-escalate universal masking requirements at all hospital sites. **Beginning Friday, February 2, masking will no longer be mandatory in clinical units, but will remain mandatory for health care workers (HCWs) when they are in direct contact with patients including the care of patients in hallways.**

Proper [hand hygiene](#) before donning and after doffing a mask continues to be required.

This change follows advice from the regional COVID-19 Subject Matter Experts (SME) committee, and is to align practice with other Southwestern Ontario hospitals.

The rationale for this change includes the fact that we have the peak of the respiratory virus season behind us, as well as the declining number of outbreaks and hospital admissions due to respiratory viruses including COVID.

## Exceptions

- Universal masking continues to be a requirement for staff and physicians who work in adult oncology areas: Oncology Day Services (ODS) and B4 (Hematology).
- Staff who register patients are considered patient-facing and must wear masks when in contact with patients unless separated by a physical barrier.
- Masking is required for HCWs who are following work self-isolation guidance from employee health.

## Visitors and patients

There are no changes to current rules in terms of visitor and patient masking:

- 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.
- Masking is still recommended for visitors and essential caregivers.

## HHS remains mask-friendly

Masks will continue to be available at all HHS facilities, and we ask that everyone support staff, physicians, learners and visitors in their individual choice regarding masking.

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

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.

Sharon, Dave and Tamar