

Position Statement to Address Double Masking and Recommendations for Medical Masks in Health-Care Settings

March 18, 2021

The following information is to respond to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) recommendations for wearing double masks or using a modified method to apply and adjust masks.¹ The recommendations from the CDC include wearing a cloth mask over a medical mask; wearing a nylon covering over a mask; using a mask fitter; or knotting the ear loops and tucking the medical mask.¹ The BC Provincial Infection Prevention and Control and Workplace Health and Safety COVID-19 Task Group, along with the Public Health Agency of Canada, do not recommend double masking in health-care settings. These groups continue to endorse wearing medical masks that meet medical-grade industry standards in health-care settings.^{2,3}

There are limitations to the application and generalizability of the findings from CDC's laboratory experiments¹ related to medical masks in health-care settings. Medical masks used in B.C. health-care settings have been assessed to ensure they meet American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) requirements.⁴ These are international standards used in Canada,² which include specifications for filtration efficiency and fluid resistance.⁵ Medical masks are designed to be used as a single personal protective equipment (PPE) item (i.e., they are not intended to be layered). Adding a second mask is unlikely to provide additional benefits to filtration efficiency and fluid resistance capabilities. Wearing extra layers of PPE may affect fit (e.g., ability to adequately cover the mouth and nose), may increase breathing resistance, and complicates doffing procedures. Modifying PPE (e.g., knotting the ear loops on medical masks) is also discouraged, as it could adversely affect the mask fit, compromise the integrity of the mask materials and damage the mask. These factors may potentially increase the risk of self-contamination and exposure to infectious agents.

Along with other hierarchies of environmental and administrative control measures, the provincial policy for mask use in health-care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic⁶ has been implemented to decrease SARS-CoV-2 (the virus associated with COVID-19) exposure for health-care workers, patients and visitors.

In summary, health-care workers, visitors and patients should continue to follow the current recommendations of PPE use in health-care settings posted on the [BCCDC website](#),⁷ including the [how to wear a face mask poster](#)⁸ and the [additional PPE poster](#).⁹ Individuals wearing a medical mask must ensure the nose band of the medical mask is molded to their face so that their mouth and nose are fully covered and continues to be covered throughout the duration of wearing the mask.

Acknowledgement:

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References:

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