TO: Health Authority CEOs

TRANSMITTAL DATE: April 11, 2023

COMMUNIQUÉ NUMBER: 2020-05 – April 2023

CLIFF NUMBER: 1217150

SUBJECT: Mask Use in Health Care Facilities.

DETAILS: This document replaces the November 4, 2021, version of Communique 2020-05, as well as Communique 2020-02, “Fit Testing for N95 Respirators”, which have been amalgamated into this Communique.

This document outlines Ministry of Health requirements for mask use by health care workers (clinical and non-clinical), patients and visitors to prevent the transmission of communicable respiratory illnesses within health care facilities.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Immediately.

MINISTRY CONTACT: Brian Sagar, Senior Director, Communicable Disease, Population and Public Health.

Stephen Brown
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Health
Ministry of Health Policy

Mask Use in Health Care Facilities

Policy Objective

- This policy protects patients, clients, residents, health care workers (clinical and non-clinical) and the public by outlining provincial expectations regarding when to use face masks in health care facilities, programs and services, including community physician offices and outpatient clinics.

Definitions

- **Medical mask**: A medical grade face mask that meets American Society for Testing and Materials International (ASTM), International Organization for Standardization (ISO) or equivalent performance requirements for bacterial filtration efficiency, particulate filtration efficiency, fluid resistance, pressure differential, flame spread, skin sensitivity and cytotoxic testing.

- **Must**: A mandatory requirement based on BC Ministry of Health directive.

- **Non-clinical staff**: All health care workers that are not providing clinical care including, but not limited to, administrative and office staff, facilities staff, contractors and volunteers.

- **Patient care area**: An area within a health care facility (including a contracted facility), hallway or lobby, which is accessible to patients, residents or clients who are there to access care or services. This includes any other location where care is provided, such as home and community care locations (including a client’s home). It does not include locations such as administrative areas or staffs’ private offices which are not generally accessed by patients, residents or clients.

- **Respirator**: A medical grade particulate filtering facepiece authorized by Health Canada which meets minimum performance certification requirements, including for fit testing, filter efficiency, and breathing resistance (e.g., N95 respirator).

- **Should**: A recommended practice to be implemented at the discretion of the individual.

Guiding Considerations

1. Masking guidance is based on current evidence about the known mechanisms of transmission of communicable respiratory diseases. Specifically, communicable respiratory diseases (e.g., influenza, COVID-19, respiratory syncytial virus) are primarily spread by liquid droplets that come from the mouth and nose when a
person coughs, sneezes, and sometimes, when a person talks.

2. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including masks, are one part of the hierarchy of infection prevention and exposure control measures for communicable diseases. As such, PPE is supplemental to, and not replacements for other measures on the hierarchy. These other measures include, but are not limited to:

   a. public health measures (Orders from the Provincial Health Officer, testing, isolation),
   b. environmental measures (being outdoors, frequent cleaning and disinfection),
   c. administrative measures (screening for symptoms and risk factors, appropriate signage, patient scheduling), and
   d. personal measures (rigorous hand hygiene, staying home when sick, respecting personal space, practicing respiratory etiquette, wearing masks when appropriate, ensuring immunizations are up-to-date).

Policy

1. Long-Term Care, Private Hospitals, Stand Alone Extended Care Hospitals Designated Under the Hospital Act, Seniors’ Assisted Living Settings and Provincial Mental Health Facilities

   Health care workers (clinical and non-clinical staff):
   - All persons working in Long-Term Care, Private Hospitals, Stand Alone Extended Care Hospitals Designated Under the Hospital Act, Seniors’ Assisted Living Settings and Provincial Mental Health Facilities must wear a medical mask and/or other PPE (e.g., respirator) where indicated by a point-of-care risk assessment that considers all occupational risks, including potential respiratory illness, or as directed by a medical health officer, or as required by workplace communicable disease safety plans.

   Visitors:
   - In routine circumstances, visitors should wear a medical mask based on personal choice.
   - Visitors must wear a medical mask or other PPE when directed by a health care professional.

   Residents:
   - In routine circumstances, residents should wear a medical mask based on personal choice.
   - Residents must wear a medical mask or other PPE when directed by a health care professional.
2. **Other Health Care Facilities and Settings where Health Care is Provided**

**Health care workers (clinical and non-clinical staff):**
- All persons working in clinical and non-clinical settings **must** wear a medical mask and/or other PPE (e.g., respirator) where indicated by a point-of-care risk assessment that considers all occupational risks, including potential respiratory illness, or as directed by a medical health officer, or as required by workplace communicable disease safety plans.

**Visitors:**
- In routine circumstances, visitors **should** wear a medical mask based on personal choice.
- Visitors **must** wear a medical mask or other PPE when directed by a health care professional.

**Patients/Clients:**
- In routine circumstances, patients and clients **should** wear a medical mask based on personal choice.
- Patients and clients **must** wear a medical mask or other PPE when directed by a health care professional.

**Implementation**
- All health care facilities **must** develop guidance materials aligned with this policy to support local implementation.
- Exceptions or accommodations to the policy **must** be considered for:
  - people under 5 years old
  - people unable to wear a mask because of a health condition or physical or mental impairment,
  - people unable to put on or remove a mask without help from another person, and
  - people communicating with someone with a hearing impairment.
- People who are required to wear a mask and are able to wear a mask, but who choose not to when directed by a health care professional, are **not** exempt.
- All health care facilities **must** provide medical masks and respirators for health care workers, non-clinical staff, patients, clients and visitors where indicated in this policy.