

AHS Guidelines for Continuous Masking

Purpose: This document outlines requirements for continuous masking for Alberta Health Services (AHS) workers in:

1. Healthcare settings – all healthcare workers (HCW) who work in patient care areas in AHS and community settings.
2. Administrative settings – all workers who work in administrative areas with no direct patient contact or with patient items.

Background: COVID-19 has been prevalent in Alberta since March 2020. There is evidence that asymptomatic, pre-symptomatic or minimally symptomatic individuals can transmit COVID-19. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) recommends that healthcare workers should mask when providing direct care to prevent transmission to patients and to their co-workers. A reasoned strategy of procedure mask use will protect patients from inadvertent exposure from HCW, will minimize HCW exposures from each other and will conserve PPE. The PHAC also recommends the use of a non-medical (cloth) mask when it is not possible to maintain physical distance, which is applicable to workers in administrative settings.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, AHS has a continuous masking directive in place. This is a requirement in accordance with the [Directive: Use of Masks During COVID-19](#).

Justification for Recommendations:

1. Workers with no symptoms of COVID-19 who are in the incubation period could inadvertently infect patients and other workers prior to developing symptoms.
2. An organization wide masking policy may reduce the number of workers required to be furloughed in the event of exposure to COVID-19.
3. PPE conservation is critical and a sustainable approach is required. In other jurisdictions, a consistent policy of continuous mask use has led to reductions in overall PPE use.

1. Approach for Workers in Healthcare Settings

Masking of Healthcare Workers (HCW) providing direct patient care or working in patient care areas in both AHS and community settings:

- a. HCW are required to wear a surgical/procedure mask continuously, at all times and in all areas of their workplace if they are involved in direct patient contact or cannot maintain a physical distance (of two metres) from patients and co-workers.
- b. HCW are asked to use surgical/procedure masks in a judicious manner to help conserve supplies and ensure availability throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- c. The surgical/procedure mask should be immediately changed and safely disposed of whenever it is soiled or wet, whenever the HCW feels it may have become contaminated and after care for any patient on Droplet +/- Contact precautions (i.e. suspected or confirmed influenza-like illness or COVID-19).
- d. Follow Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) protocols including hand hygiene and the use of additional personal protective equipment when delivering patient care according to the [AHS point-of-care risk assessment](#) (PCRA).
- e. Additional guidance is available for extended PPE use in dedicated [COVID-19 units and ILI positive holding areas](#).
- f. When taking a break or eating a meal, the wearer should dispose of the mask and perform hand hygiene. Physical distancing must be maintained, and a new mask should be applied before returning to work.

For guidance on using mask extenders, see [Tips on the Use of Mask Extenders](#).

For community settings where PPE supplies are required, please contact: cpsmoperations.eoc@ahs.ca

2. Approach for Workers in Administrative Settings

Workers who work in administrative areas with no direct patient contact or patient items are required to wear a mask continuously in all areas of their workplace where they cannot maintain adequate physical distancing.

Workers must also follow routine practices such as regular hand hygiene.

- a. All workers who can perform their duties from home should do so to preserve PPE.
- b. Workers in these areas can choose to wear their own non-medical (e.g. cloth) mask.
 - i. All workers are required to wear a surgical/procedure mask when contact with patients can be anticipated. When entering other public areas of a patient care facility (e.g., elevators, common areas, gift shops) workers must don a surgical/procedure mask. If possible, consider using alternate routes to access your workspace. AHS will provide surgical/procedure masks to any

- workers in administrative areas if they choose not to use their own non-medical (cloth) mask.
- c. Non-medical (cloth) masks should be immediately changed if the mask becomes soiled or damp, or if there is a risk that the mask has become contaminated.
 - d. When taking a break, or eating a meal, the wearer should:
 - i. dispose of the mask if a surgical/procedure mask, or
 - ii. remove the non-medical (cloth) mask placing it on a clean surface with the outer side down. Always perform hand hygiene. Physical distancing must be maintained and your mask must be applied before returning to work.

Please note the use of a face shield is not an adequate alternative to using a non-medical (cloth) mask in an administrative setting.

Non-medical (cloth) mask considerations:

- a. When choosing a non-medical (cloth) mask, the best option is a triple layer mask, as described by the World Health Organization (WHO). Health Canada and the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) also have recommendations for cloth masks. AHS offers triple layer cloth masks in the online store.
- b. Bring more than one non-medical (cloth) mask with you to work so it can be changed if it becomes wet, soiled or contaminated.
- c. After removing your non-medical (cloth) mask, store it in a paper bag or sealed container. Workers are responsible to clean and maintain non-medical (cloth) masks on their own. Launder the mask daily in a hot cycle using regular soap.
- d. The non-medical (cloth) mask must cover the nose and the mouth.

For questions related to continuous masking at AHS, email PPE@ahs.ca.