

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Guidance to Help Make Continuous Masking Work for You

November 12, 2020

It is very important that we continue to work together to identify, implement and maintain strategies that will slow down and prevent transmission of COVID-19 illness to our patients, families and each other. Other countries have used continuous masking to curb the spread of the disease and Canada is following suit. Based on current scientific evidence, AHS has a continuous masking directive in place. This is a **requirement** in accordance with the [Directive: Use of Masks During COVID-19](#).

Continuous masking is a critical action taken by all AHS staff, physicians, volunteers and contractors to protect the health and safety of our patients and one another.

Continuous masking has been challenging for some AHS workers. To support our teams in wearing masks at all times, below are tips for all AHS workers to manage the discomfort that may come with continuous masking.

Before contacting your Occupational Health Nurse or a Workplace Health and Safety Advisor, talk to your manager to identify which of the suggestions below apply to your work situation. Then try to work through the tips below in the order they appear.

Some of the suggestions listed may require time before you see improvements. If you still are not able to resolve the issue, please report in [MySafetyNet](#). If an Occupational Health Nurse contacts you for follow up, they will ask if you have tried the strategies outlined.

AHS sources and distributes procedure masks from a number of existing and new suppliers. All new products meet Canadian standards and safety measures, and pass a quality review.

Alternative brands of masks and equipment

Alternative brands of masks

- Try an alternative brand of mask for a period of time to see if that resolves the issue. Managers should work with their local [Contracting, Procurement & Supply Management \(CPSM\)](#) representative to identify alternative brands that can be ordered.
- Try one change at a time when trying alternate masks.
- Trial each change for a minimum of two weeks before making a modification to gain a better idea of which brand will be most successful. If symptoms/conditions worsen during the trial, discontinue use and report/update in [MySafetyNet](#).

If you have questions or concerns about cloth masking, you will find more information in the [AHS Guidelines for Continuous Masking](#).

Masks with ties

- Try a mask with ties to alleviate pressure points. Managers should contact [Contracting, Procurement & Supply Management](#) (CPSM) for available options. Please note that a limited supply of masks with ties are available.

Mask extenders

- Try a mask extender or ear savers to relieve pressure behind the ear.
- Review [Tips on the Use of Mask Extenders](#) for recommended products and tips for use.
- Ear savers must NOT be used with N95 respirators. They may impact the fit and seal.

Skin

The *Nurses Specialized in Wound, Ostomy and Continence Canada* ([NSWOC](#)) website provides a number of resources to support prevention, care and treatment of skin irritation related to PPE usage.

Skin Integrity

- Take measures to ensure you have healthy, resilient skin. Good nutrition and hydration are key. A strong skin barrier provides the best defense against pressure injuries associated with continuous masking.
- Practice proper cleaning and moisturizing practices using lotions and creams provided by AHS. Skin protection products may be helpful in protecting areas of pressure where the skin is red but not broken. Contact [CPSM](#) for available options.
- Consider personal health, allergies, and skin conditions when choosing skin products.
- Try a facial prophylactic dressing (not for use with N95). See [NSWOC](#).
- Remove the mask - only when it is not required - to prevent injury to the skin.
- If you need to remove your mask to eat or drink and there isn't room to physically distance, you must find another location where you can maintain appropriate distance.
- After trying the suggestions above, consult with Workplace Health and Safety/Occupational Health and Safety for additional advice on individual concerns and needs.

Other things to try

- Consider work accommodations that would not require continuous masking.
- Is there a certain amount of time that the mask can be tolerated? Consider work requirements that could be adjusted.
- Depending on the position and staffing levels, try rotating heavy-exertion and less demanding tasks. Change the mask frequently and use skin protection if needed.
- Review the Job Demands Analysis for the position (if available) to determine if tasks can be modified.
- Apply rest intervals along with physical distancing (e.g., 15 minutes off, every two hours)

Pre-existing conditions worsened by continuous masking

- Workers with pre-existing conditions exacerbated by continuous masking should report the issues in [MySafetyNet](#). They may also notify their [Occupational Health Nurse](#) (found under Workplace Health and Safety).
- Pre-existing conditions may include, but are not limited to, diagnosed respiratory conditions (e.g., asthma), claustrophobia, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and other allergies.

Reporting mask related issues

Report all incidents/injuries pertaining to continuous masking.

- Notify your supervisor/manager immediately when an incident occurs.
- Report to [MySafetyNet](#) all work-related incidents.

Report all issues related to masking equipment.

- Notify your supervisor/manager immediately when an incident occurs.
- In order to track, trend and action concerns about masks or any personal protective equipment (PPE), complete and submit an AHS [Medical Device Incident or Problem Report](#) form.
- For workers outside AHS, Covenant, APL and related entities, email photos with the name of the product, manufacturer, manufacturer product code, lot/batch number, expiry date (when present), and a description of the problem or incident to MDIP@ahs.ca.

Once you have reported, you may be contacted by an Occupational Health Nurse or Ability Management Advisor for follow up.

Resources

Other AHS continuous masking resources:

- [Use of Masks During COVID-19 Directive](#)
- [AHS Guidelines for Continuous Masking](#)
- [Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) Frequently Asked Questions](#)