



Government issues province-wide policy for mask use in health facilities

The Ministry of Health is requiring all visitors and out-patients to wear medical-grade masks when visiting a health care facility including hospitals, long-term care facilities and assisted living.

While the November 5 policy doesn't change mask requirements for long-term care, it does provide standard direction for hospitals, out-patient labs and other settings where mask policies were inconsistent across the province.

The policy sets out when a medical mask is required in the following settings.

Long-term care and assisted living

The long-term care and assisted living guidance has not changed.

- All persons working in long-term care and assisted living must wear a medical mask at all times, including in breakrooms and common areas, unless eating or drinking.
- All visitors are required to wear a medical mask at all times.

Hospitals, out-patient labs and other

- The policy requires that staff working in clinical or patient care areas must wear a medical mask including in breakrooms and common areas, unless eating or drinking.
- Visitors must wear medical masks when entering or moving around any clinical/patient care areas of a health facility.
- Staff in non-clinical settings must follow the mask guidance in their workplace COVID19 safety plans. Visitors and patients in these areas must wear a mask.
- Patients (admitted and outpatient) are required to wear masks when entering and moving around the facility except as directed by a health professional. Admitted patients (except when otherwise determined through a point-of-care assessment) are not required to wear a mask in their room.

Facilities are to provide the medical masks required under this policy.

HEU has raised concerns with the Ministry of Health that the policy lacks specific direction regarding mask use for workers in non-clinical settings, and have asked that protections for staff in these areas to be strengthened.

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In addition, the policy needs to be expanded to specifically include workers in community settings.

The policy does not replace the need for strong prevention measures, including physical distancing, physical barriers, cleaning, infection control procedures, and supportive sick leave policies. We continue to push for these measures to be implemented and maintained.

At this time, the personal protective equipment required for care of patients or residents has not changed. Continue to follow your workplace protocols.

November 19, 2020