

# Northumberland Hills Hospital

## Universal Masking Policy\_March 2021

### PURPOSE:

Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) continues to endorse a universal masking requirement as a key infection prevention and control protocol in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The requirement to wear masks or appropriate face coverings is in alignment with the direction of hospitals across the province, including regional partners across the Ontario Health East region. For the health and safety of everyone at NHH, the universal mask requirement applies to all staff, physicians, patients, volunteers, visitors/essential caregivers and contractors who may have reason to enter the main hospital site or a community location housing a hospital service.

### DEFINITIONS:

Patient: An individual accessing inpatient or outpatient health services.

Visitor/essential caregiver: A guest of the patient.

PPE: Personal Protective Equipment

### POLICY:

1. Hospital-issued medical masks are mandatory in all areas of the hospital and community locations housing a hospital service. Any exception is at the sole discretion of NHH and/or guidance provided by the Ministry of Health and/or Public Health. This universal masking policy relates to patients and visitors of NHH, specifically:
  - a. **Visitors/essential caregivers**: a medical mask must always be worn
  - b. **Outpatients**: a medical mask must always be worn
  - c. **Inpatients**: when care or services are being administered inside a 2-metre radius (e.g. when a blood pressure is taken, cleaning conducted), when leaving their room (i.e. to walk in the hallway or to receive a diagnostic test) or any other instance when physical distancing from others may not be possible
2. While universal masking is mandatory, limited circumstances where individuals qualify for a mask exemption do exist. Exceptions to the universal masking policy include:
  - a. when a mask must be removed for clinical purposes (e.g. for an oral exam or nasopharyngeal swab)
  - b. when there is a contraindication to masking or masking is a challenge (e.g. for patients with dementia, some psychiatric conditions, moderate to severe hypoxia, paediatric patients under the age of 2 and individuals who have a hearing impairment or work with those who have a hearing impairment where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication)

All patients and visitors will be screened at the entrances prior to entering the hospital. Patients/visitors will be asked a series of screening questions and will be asked to remove gloves (if wearing) and perform hand hygiene. Those coming into the hospital for an appointment or to the Emergency Department who present with their own mask will be asked to replace it with a hospital-issued medical mask OR don the hospital mask on top of their personal mask and asked to plan to wear it throughout their visit and to dispose when they leave.

3. The following process will apply to patients/visitors who refuse to comply with the universal

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masking policy and/or indicate they meet the exception criteria as identified above:

- a. After initial screening, the patient/visitor will (as staff of screening desk permits) be referred to a secondary screener, or asked to wait, to avoid delaying others who may also be waiting to visit/enter.
  - b. In instances where a visitor/caregiver refuses to wear a hospital-issued medical mask, and they do not meet any of the above acceptable exceptions, the secondary screener will explain politely that entry will not be permitted at this time.
  - c. In instances where a patient refuses to wear a mask, the secondary screener will:
    - i. Determine whether or not the patient meets the exception criteria as indicated above.
    - ii. Alert the appropriate unit/clinic manager and staff.
  - d. If it is determined that the patient does meet the exception criteria, and the unit/clinic can accommodate them (in empty room/space, etc.), the patient will be allowed to proceed to their appointment/visit. They will be provided with a sticker to visibly identify to staff/others that they meet the exception criteria. The sticker must always be worn while in hospital. They should be advised to minimize interactions, cover their nose/mouth as much as possible in public areas, and to clean hands frequently while in hospital.
  - e. If it is determined that the patient does not meet the exception criteria (i.e. they do not have a medical condition precluding them from wearing a mask/face covering, no advance notification was provided), and the unit/clinic is unable to accommodate at this time, the patient/visitor will be politely asked to leave the hospital.
  - f. The appointment/visit will be cancelled, and the patient will need to reschedule the appointment/visit. The patient should be advised that, when they call to reschedule, that they inform the clinic that they cannot/will not wear a mask so that arrangements, if possible, can be determined in advance.
4. In instances where a visitor/patient refuses to comply with the NHH Universal Masking policy, staff should refer to this policy and educate the patient/visitor on the ongoing evidence supporting universal masking when indoors. Should the patient/visitor continue to escalate and/or begin recording the interaction, staff should:
- a. Remind the patient/visitor that video recording is strictly prohibited without express consent
  - b. Politely ask the patient/visitor to leave the hospital
  - c. Contact Security for assistance, as required
  - d. Contact the appropriate Manager/Clinical Operations Manager for support, as required
  - e. Initiate an *Awareness to Action* report as appropriate.

## REFERENCES:

Toronto Region Hospital Operations Table. 2020 07 06. Recommended Guidance - Masking in Hospitals.

North York General Hospital, Universal Masking Policy.

Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit, "Use of Non-Medical Masks and Face Coverings Within Public Spaces." 2020 07 17. <https://www.hkpr.on.ca/2020/07/07/use-of-non-medical-masks-in-commercial-establishments/>

Public Health Ontario Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee, Interim Guidance for Infection Prevention and Control of SARS-CoV-2 Variants of Concern for Health Care Settings, February 2021