Northumberland Hills Hospital

Universal Masking Policy

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. Masks or face coverings 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 mask/face covering must always be worn
   b. Outpatients: a mask/face covering must always be worn
   c. Inpatients: when leaving their room (i.e. for a diagnostic test) or when close contact is required for a prolonged period and 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. Children under the age of 2 years old
   b. Individuals who are unable to remove a mask without help
   c. Patients/visitors who have specific medical, mental health and/or cognitive conditions that preclude the use of masks for extended periods of time (note: it is expected that these instances will be rare, considered on a case-by-case basis by the care team and, as required, involve consultation with the unit manager and NHH infection prevention and control)
   d. 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

3. 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 already have a cloth mask in good, clean condition, are encouraged to bring it with them and plan to wear it throughout their visit. The mask/face covering must always cover the individual’s mouth, nose and chin. Those who do not have a cloth mask will have
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one provided for them, to use during their stay and to take home and reuse.

4. The following process will apply to patients/visitors who refuse to comply with the universal 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 mask, and they do not meet any of the 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.

5. 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.