

# University Health Network Policy & Procedure Manual Infection Prevention & Control: Universal Masking

## Policy

University Health Network (UHN) is committed to providing a safe environment for all persons within UHN sites. During the COVID-19 pandemic, to protect all [members of TeamUHN](#) (also referred to as “**UHN personnel**”), patients, and essential caregivers/visitors, a universal masking protocol is in place, requiring the use of an **approved medical face mask or respirator**, at all times while within a UHN site, with limited [exemptions](#). Additional measures for use of approved medical face masks and respirators for clinical care are outlined in Public Health Ontario’s [Interim IPAC Recommendations for Use of Personal Protective Equipment for Care of Individuals with Suspect or Confirmed COVID-19 Technical Brief](#) and [UHN Guidelines for Extended Use of PPE for Healthcare Workers during COVID-19 Pandemic](#). Any patient not meeting the exemption criteria, or member of TeamUHN or essential caregiver/visitor who refuses to wear an approved medical face mask or respirator (refer to the [Universal Masking Policy at UHN](#) patient education document), will be denied entry into UHN sites.

Cloth, homemade, and non-medical face masks **may not** be worn by any person while within a UHN site or [research area](#).

**Note:** For the purposes of this policy, the term “**patient**” refers to all UHN inpatients and outpatients, as well as research study participants, including healthy volunteers.

**Note:** The term “**face mask**” refers to a UHN-approved medical face mask or respirator, in keeping with recommendations of the Public Health Agency of Canada (refer to [COVID-19 Mask Use: Advice for Community Settings](#)), Public Health Ontario (refer to [Interim IPAC Recommendations for Use of Personal Protective Equipment for Care of Individuals with Suspect or Confirmed COVID-19 Technical Brief](#)), and UHN additional precautions. For patient-facing UHN personnel who require frequent use of N95 respirators for isolation purposes, and in units under COVID-19 outbreaks, N95 respirators may be used in extended fashion and also serve as a universal mask. Staff must only wear one face mask at a time; double masking is not recommended.

If a patient has been granted a medical exemption to wearing a face mask, they will be provided a face shield which must be worn at all times while in the UHN site.

UHN personnel and essential caregivers/visitors are not allowed any exemption to the universal masking protocol **when entering** a UHN site.

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For [UHN personnel](#) not performing direct patient care tasks and who are not working in [research areas](#), approved face masks may be temporarily removed while alone in a defined area (e.g. in an office with or without a closed door) or where 2 metres of physical distance can be confidently and consistently maintained from others (e.g. meeting in a large conference room). In areas where a 2 metre distance cannot be anticipated in non-clinical areas, including narrow hallways, lounge areas, or shared work areas, approved medical face masks must be worn.

Approved face masks may be removed when eating or drinking in designated areas, as long as physical distancing of at least 2 metres is maintained.

**Note:** If an approved medical face mask is temporarily removed under the conditions identified above, perform hand hygiene and store the approved medical face mask as per [UHN Guidelines for Extended Use of PPE for Healthcare Workers during COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

Approved medical face masks must be worn appropriately, i.e. well-fitting and covering both the mouth and nose.

**Note:** Personal or political beliefs are not acceptable grounds for exemptions to the universal masking protocol. Any person refusing to wear an approved medical face mask solely due to personal or political beliefs will be refused entry to UHN sites.

**Note:** UHN staff, refer also to [Universal Masking Guidelines: FAQ for UHN Employees](#).

## Inpatient Masking

All patients should wear an approved face mask at all times, including inpatients, during interactions with healthcare staff and essential caregivers/visitors, including within the patient's room and in common spaces. Wearing an approved face mask is also required, at all times, when patients leave their rooms for any reason, including for diagnostic tests and clinical appointments (e.g. medical imaging, hemodialysis, etc.), unless the patient is exempted due to medical reasons.

With each interaction, staff should assess whether there are any contraindications to patient masking due to medical concerns. (Refer to [Appendix: Universal Masking Exemption Criteria](#).) Other considerations include the patient's respiratory status, hemodynamic stability, and mental status.

Inpatients may wear any level medical face mask that has been evaluated and approved for hospital use. Approved face masks must be provided to inpatients by the hospital. Face masks brought in from home must not be used within the hospital by inpatients.

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**Note:** Masking of patients inside their rooms is not generally necessary when staff are not present, even when patients are admitted to multi-bed rooms, given the distancing between patient beds. However, patients can be advised to wear an approved face mask when ambulating to the washroom if there is anticipated close contact with other patients, depending on the layout of the room.

**Note:** Refer to [Procedures: Recommended Steps for Inpatient Masking](#).

### **Guidelines for Troubleshooting, Exemptions, and Refusals**

- This policy must be communicated to all patients on arrival to the medical unit (see [Appendix: Masking on the Inpatient Unit: Sample Script for Patients](#)).
- It may be helpful to store approved face masks closer to patient rooms so as to facilitate easy access for staff entering the room, depending on the layout of the inpatient unit.
- For patients with tracheostomies, masking of the tracheostomy can be considered. An approved face mask may be placed on the tracheostomy; using a plastic extender may help with this masking.
- **Refusals:**
  - a. If a patient refuses to wear an approved face mask when outside their room for a non-medical reason, follow [Appendix: Mandatory Masking Escalation Policy](#).
  - b. If a patient refuses to wear an approved face mask for a non-medical reason while inside their room, no additional escalation is required.

### **Exemptions**

#### **Outpatient & Emergency Department Patient Exemptions**

In accordance with Government of Ontario regulations, children under the age of two and those with medical conditions that preclude the use of masks for extended periods of time may be provided exemptions for the universal masking protocol (see [Appendix: Universal Masking Exemption Criteria](#)).

In addition, UHN will consider exemptions for patients presenting in the Emergency Department (ED), on an individual basis. (Refer to [Guidelines for the Management of Patients who Decline to Wear a Mask in the ED](#).)

For planned patient visits, medical exemptions to wearing an approved face mask must be pre-assessed by a UHN most responsible practitioner (MRPr)/most responsible

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physician (MRPh) before the patient comes to the site (e.g. over the phone). The UHN MRPr/ MRPh must provide the patient with a [Face Mask Exemption Form](#), which the patient must bring with them when coming to a UHN site.

**Note:** Medical exemptions from non-UHN healthcare professionals will not be accepted.

## TeamUHN Exemptions

[Members of TeamUHN](#) who are unable to wear an approved face mask due to a medical condition must engage with Health Services to review possible medical accommodations.

## Roles & Responsibilities

### Clinics & Research Teams

- Prior to all outpatient clinic appointments or research visits, communicate UHN’s universal masking policy to patients and assess whether the patient has any medical exemptions (see [Appendix: Universal Masking Exemption Criteria](#)).
- If the patient has a medical exemption to wearing an approved face mask, inform the patient that they will still be required to don a face shield and provide the patient with a [Face Mask Exemption Form](#) that must be presented at the screening station.

**Note:** The screener will provide that patient with a face shield to wear and an exemption sticker.

- If patient states that they will refuse to wear an approved face mask for a non-medical reason during this communication, clinic admins/receptionists must contact the MRPr/MRPh so that the MRPr/MRPh can discuss clinical options and alternatives with the patient.
- **Clinic MRPr/MRPh:** If a symptomatic patient presents at a screening station with a face mask exemption, assess whether the patient visit can be deferred. If the visit cannot be deferred:
  - a. The patient must be escorted to and from the clinic by a trained clinic member who is wearing full personal protective equipment (PPE), including an approved face mask, face/eye protection, gloves, and gown.
  - b. If an elevator is required for transit, the elevator must be cleared of other individuals, and high-touch surfaces must be disinfected after use.

**Note:** Patient must go straight into a clinic room or be kept 2 metres from others.

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## Environmental Services

- Support clinic staff with disinfecting high-touch surfaces, e.g. in elevators after use by symptomatic patients.

## Screeners

- Ensure that all persons entering the hospital are wearing an approved face mask and that the approved face mask is donned properly and in good condition.
- Provide an approved face mask to anyone without an approved face mask.

**Note:** Respirators are available at destination units/departments.

- If someone refuses to don an approved face mask and does not have a medical exemption, provide education to reinforce the reasons for universal masking using approved masks.
  - a. If they continue to refuse wearing an approved face mask, deny them entry and ask them to leave the premises. Escalate to Security, if required.
  - b. If they refuse to wear a UHN-issued face mask because they prefer to use their own N95 respirator or KN95 respirator, provide education on the risks of counterfeit N95 and KN95 respirators and permit them to enter the premises. Persons should be provided a UHN-approved medical face mask, KN95 respirator, or N95 respirator, as appropriate, when they reach their unit/destination.
- **If someone has a medical exemption:**
  - a. **For asymptomatic patients with a medical exemption:**
    - i. Verify that the patient has a medical exemption via a [Face Mask Exemption Form](#) provided by a UHN MRPr/MRPh.

**Note:** Medical exemptions from non-UHN healthcare professionals will not be accepted.

**Note:** If a medical reason for the refusal cannot be verified, deny them entry and ask them to leave the premises. Escalate to Security, if required.
    - ii. Provide the patient with a face shield.
    - iii. Provide the patient with a **mask exemption** sticker.

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**b. For symptomatic patients with a medical exemption:**

- i. Verify that the patient has a medical exemption via a [Face Mask Exemption Form](#) provided by a UHN MRPr/MRPh.  
**Note:** Medical exemptions from non-UHN healthcare professionals will not be accepted.  
**Note:** If a medical reason for the refusal cannot be verified, deny them entry and ask them to leave the premises. Escalate to Security, if required.
- ii. Provide the patient with a face shield.
- iii. Direct the patient away from the screening line and ask them to wait in a designated area such that other staff and patients are not within 2 metres of the symptomatic individual.
- iv. Inform the clinic that a symptomatic patient with a mask exemption is at the screening station.
- v. Verify with the clinic MRPr/MRPh that the clinic visit is necessary (i.e. cannot or should not be deferred).  
**Note:** If a clinician is not available to verify the necessity of the appointment, ask the patient to leave the premises. Escalate to Security, if required.
- vi. If the clinician determines that clinical care cannot be deferred, provide the patient with a **mask exemption** sticker.  
**Note:** The patient must be escorted **to and from** the clinic by a trained clinic member from the clinic wearing full PPE.

- **In ED:** Screener/triage must engage a physician/nurse practitioner (NP) to assess the patient before anyone is refused treatment.

**Security**

- Proactively support screening staff, as required.

**All Members of TeamUHN**

- Wear an approved face mask, as required by this policy and [UHN Guidelines for Extended Use of PPE for Healthcare Workers during COVID-19 Pandemic](#).
- Request that anyone not wearing an approved face mask within UHN sites don an approved face mask (using the [ARCC error prevention tool](#), as appropriate).

**Escalation**

Escalate as required through the normal chain of command.

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## Definitions

**Clinical area:** Any part of the Hospital where care is provided, including, but not limited to: examination rooms, procedure rooms, control rooms, operating suites, holding areas, inpatient rooms, clinic offices and patient education areas.

**Member of TeamUHN** (also referred to as “**personnel**”): Includes all UHN employees, leaders, physicians, learners, researchers, research study sponsor representatives, volunteers, contractors, vendors, and individuals conducting business on behalf of UHN.

**Research area:** Includes wet and dry laboratories and related common spaces.

## Procedure

### Recommended Steps for Inpatient Masking

1. After entering the patient’s room, assess the patient’s medical suitability for wearing a mask (see [Appendix: Universal Masking Exemption Criteria](#)).

2. If suitable, request the patient don an approved face mask.

- Provide the patient a clean, new, approved face mask.

**Note:** The patient may reuse an approved face mask if the mask is not damaged or soiled. However, an approved face mask should not be used for more than 24 hours.

- Provide instructions on how to properly don the approved face mask, including using hand hygiene and molding the nasal bridge.

**Note:** Staff may need to assist the patient with donning the mask.

- If the patient is already wearing an approved face mask or has an approved face mask in their room, visually inspect it for obvious damage/contamination/soiling.

3. If the patient does not have access to alcohol-based hand rub, assist the patient with cleaning their hands when they are donning/doffing their face mask.

4. After completing the interaction with the patient, ask the patient if they would like to remove the face mask.

**Note:** The patient may continue to wear the approved face mask if they wish.

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5. If the patient removes their mask, discard it if it is damaged, soiled, or contaminated; otherwise, the approved face mask may be stored for re-use.
  - Perform hand hygiene before storage.
  - Options for storage include: placing the approved face mask in a bag; or placing the mask, patient-facing side up, on a paper towel on the patient's overbed table.

## References

1. Toronto Region COVID-19 Hospital Operations Table. *Recommended Guidelines – Masking in Hospitals*, 06 July 2020. Ontario Health (Toronto)

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# Appendices

## Universal Masking Exemption Criteria

Medical exemptions to the use of a face mask or respirator may include, but are not limited to:

- severe breathlessness
- high oxygen requirements
- allergic reaction to contents of mask
- mental health concerns:
  - a. severe anxiety
  - b. claustrophobia
  - c. post-traumatic stress disorder
  - d. sensory processing disorder
  - e. severe dementia

## Masking on the Inpatient Unit: Sample Script for Patients

Dear Patient,

University Health Network and its medical teams are committed to providing you the best possible care. However, your participation in following the recommendations of your healthcare team is required to achieve the best possible outcome. In order to protect you and others from respiratory viruses, inpatients and visitors are asked to wear a UHN-approved medical face mask or respirator whenever they are interacting with any healthcare workers or with each other, including when patients are outside their rooms.

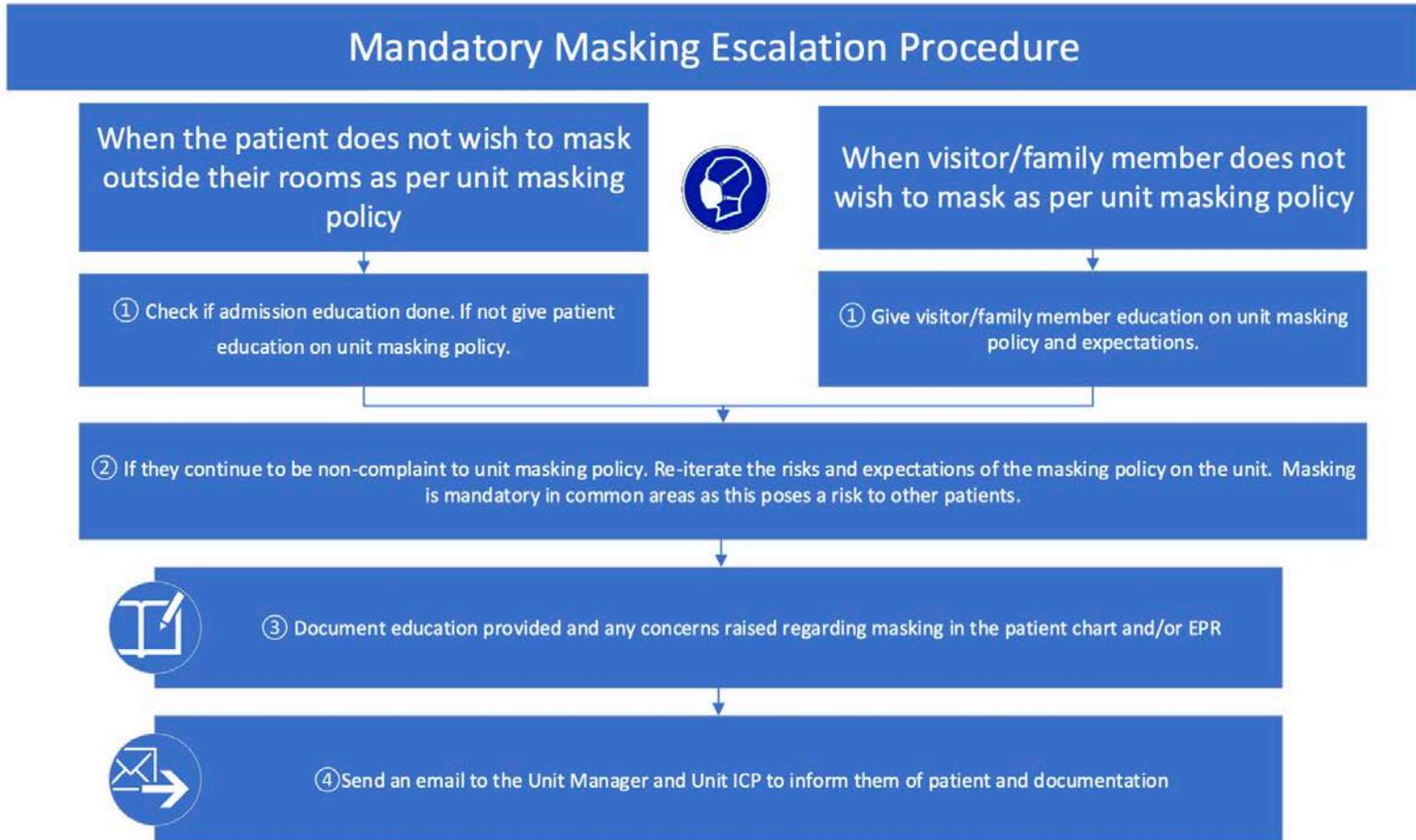
Respiratory viruses can cause very serious problems by affecting your lungs and breathing and may sometimes make you very sick. Therefore, whenever safe to so, please wear a UHN-approved medical face mask or respirator when interacting with our staff in order to help us keep you safe.

Thank you.

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## Mandatory Masking Escalation Procedure



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