



## **Non-medical Masks FAQ**

The proven ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19: are staying home if you are not feeling well; keeping your distance from others; and frequent excellent hand hygiene.

Masks are another measure that can reduce COVID-19 spread. Their main role is to protect others from your respiratory secretions. There are lots of questions about the use of non-medical masks, especially given recent recommendations from public health authorities for their use in certain situations. **Nova Scotia Health is now requiring patients, visitors, and essential support people to wear a non-medical mask when in hospitals and other health care facilities.**

As always, we remind you that guidance is expected to change as the pandemic evolves. We continually monitor the spread of COVID-19 provincially and discuss what we are seeing with Public Health.

Please refer to the FAQ for [Healthcare Worker Masking Guidelines](#) for masking during your shift/work hours.

### **Does this mean that all patients entering an IWK/Nova Scotia Health facility are required to wear a mask?**

We ask everyone who shows up to their scheduled appointment or visit to wear a mask. People will be screened at the door and will be required to wear a mask. Patients who have symptoms of respiratory infection will be asked to wear a medical mask. Visitors/essential support people with symptoms consistent with COVID-19, on self-isolation or being tested for COVID-19 due to recent travel or potential exposure to the virus will not be permitted to enter.

### **Does this apply to everyone entering a Nova Scotia Health site?**

This change does not apply to hospital inpatients, children under two years of age, or staff working in non-clinical areas where they are able to maintain physical distance from others. Staff and physicians working in non-clinical areas where they are able to maintain physical distance from others are not required to wear a mask while at their office or workstation. However, all staff and physicians should be wearing a mask on entry to the building until they arrive at their office or workstation and in public areas such as elevators and lobbies. Staff and physicians working in clinical areas are required to wear a medical mask.

Please refer to the [Healthcare Worker Masking FAQ](#) for guidance related to wearing a mask during your shift.

### **What do we mean by a non-medical mask (NMM)?**

Medical masks, which are used by health care workers and others providing direct care to COVID-19 patients, are a regulated device. That means that they need to meet defined standards. NMM are not medical devices and, so, are not regulated like medical masks and respirators. Most NMM are cloth. Some are made by companies for sale and others are homemade. Because they are not regulated, they vary in the types of materials and the number of layers they are made of and, therefore, are expected to differ in how well they contain droplets coming from the nose and mouth. For the latest information visit the [Public Health Agency of Canada - face coverings](#), Public Health Agency of Canada web site.

### **What happens if a patient, essential support person or visitor refuses to wear a mask?**

We expect Nova Scotians to understand, support and cooperate with the requirement to wear a mask. If someone refuses to wear a mask, remind them that the masking policy has been put into place for their safety as well as the safety of vulnerable patients and visitors, and our health care team.

The vast majority of Nova Scotians are able to wear masks. However, if someone tells us they are unable to wear a mask for medical reasons we will take them at their word.

If you need additional support or guidance, please reach out to your supervisor or site leader.

**What are medical reasons a person could not wear a mask?**

The vast majority of Nova Scotians are able to wear a mask. There are very few valid medical reasons to keep someone from being able to wear one and they are mainly related to anxiety. The Canadian Thoracic Society states that there is no evidence that wearing a mask worsens a chronic lung condition such as asthma or COPD. For some people with chronic breathing conditions, wearing a mask can make them feel that they cannot breathe properly, which can create anxiety. There are people with mental health conditions for whom wearing a mask creates anxiety. There are also people with cognitive or developmental disabilities who are unable to wear a mask.

We will not be asking for a medical certificate. If someone tells us they are unable to wear a mask for medical reasons we will take them at their word.

**Will anyone be denied care if they refuse to wear a mask?**

No. Medical care and health services will NOT be denied even if they refuse to wear a mask.

**Will we provide masks to those who do not have them?**

Yes. We strongly encourage patients, visitors and essential support people to bring their own masks, however if they do not have one with them, one will be provided.

**Why are you adding this requirement now? Why not sooner?**

We have been monitoring the situation closely and are constantly evolving our response to COVID-19. As we see inconsistent use of the recommended public health measures in the community and as we plan for a potential second wave, we want to ensure a consistent approach across all hospitals and health centres in the province.

**What if a patient is symptomatic when arriving to a facility and is wearing their own NMM?**

Symptomatic patients who have their own NMM will be asked to replace it with the medical mask we will give to them.

**Do visitors/essential support people have to wear a mask while in the patient's room?**

Masks should be worn in patient rooms as maintaining physical distancing from patients, staff, and others is difficult in these spaces.

**Are staff required to wear a mask during their shift?**

Staff and physicians working in clinical areas are required to wear a medical mask. Staff working in non-clinical areas where they are able to maintain physical distance from others are not required to wear a mask while at their office or workstation. However all staff and physicians should be wearing a mask on entry to the building until they arrive at their office or workstation and in public areas such as elevators and lobbies. Please refer to the [Healthcare Worker Masking FAQ](#) for additional guidance related to wearing a mask during your shift.

**I work in a non-clinical area. When do I have to wear a mask?**

Staff and physicians should be wearing a non-medical mask until they arrive at their office or workstation. For example, when walking through hallways, using elevators, within common areas. If able to socially distance, within your office or workstation, at their destination, the mask can be removed. Please keep in mind masks are not a replacement for other public health measures. The best ways to keep the work place safe are to stay home when feeling unwell, maintain physical distancing at all times, and do excellent and frequent hand hygiene.

**Will staff working in non-clinical areas be given a non-medical mask?**

No staff and physicians working in non-clinical areas are requested to bring their own non-medical masks with them.

**Why aren't the IWK/Nova Scotia Health currently giving medical masks to all people entering their facilities?**

There is not an infinite supply of PPE, including medical masks. Using them now, when the circulation of virus in the community is very low means that >99% of the mask use will be for people who are not infectious. We believe that these masks are better saved for health care workers and a potential second wave.

**Should I be encouraging my patients to use a NMM?**

Yes. Remind patients that the mask is meant to protect others and educate them on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and proper mask use.

**How long will this requirement be in place?**

We are monitoring the situation closely and making adjustments to our policies and procedures as appropriate.

**Is there any information about wearing of non-medical masks?**

It is important to wear a mask safely. Avoid touching your face, mouth, nose or eyes while wearing a mask. Learn about [choosing and how to wear a non-medical mask](#). More information on [how to wear a non-medical mask or face covering properly](#) [\(video\)](#).