

RESPIRATORY VIRUS MASKING GUIDANCE

Emerging and Re-emerging Infections Network (ERIN)

Fall & Winter 2024

Reducing the risk of transmission of respiratory viruses is everyone's responsibility. This respiratory season, continue to keep everybody safe using the guidance below.



MASKING GUIDANCE

- **Patients, visitors, essential care partners, volunteers, physicians, and NS Health staff** are required to wear a mask in **all acute care facilities (e.g., hospitals, including inpatient and ambulatory areas)** where patients are present and direct clinical care is being provided. While masks remain encouraged in common areas where people gather, they are not required to be worn upon entry in this context except for people who are symptomatic.
 - Staff may remove masks at nursing stations, break rooms and meeting rooms when no patients are present.
 - Clinical areas* within acute care facilities should ensure that signage and masks are visible upon unit entry.

**A clinical area is any area where patient care is provided, this includes: Diagnostic Imaging, blood collection, patient rooms, waiting rooms, inpatient and ambulatory care areas, and any other areas where patient care is provided.*

- During the delivery of programs or services **in private homes** with people who are at **high risk**** of severe COVID-19 disease, **masking is required** for all people present during the care visit.

***People who are 65 or older with moderate to severe immunocompromise /with less than two doses of COVID-19 vaccine / 6 months of age or older and at higher risk of other (non-COVID) illness. When vaccine status unclear, wear a mask.*

- **Clinics outside of acute care facilities** (e.g., Primary Health Care Clinics, Collaborative Care Clinics, Long Term Care, etc.) masking continues to be recommended but not required. Implementation of masking in this context is at the discretion of the clinic program leaders.
- **All NS Health Long Term Care** facilities follow provincial guidance, *A Guide to Respiratory Virus Infection and Outbreak Management in Long-Term Care Facilities.*

PRE-APPOINTMENT PATIENT SCREENING

Respiratory screening prior to an in-person appointment at a Nova Scotia Health facility:

- Screening criteria can be provided in a letter to the patient prior to an appointment, or
- Phone screening can be completed in advance of the appointment.



RETURN TO WORK GUIDANCE

Healthcare workers who have **tested positive** for **COVID**:

- Must remain off work for 5 days following symptom onset or date of test.
- Upon return to work, they must wear a mask up to and including day 10.

Healthcare workers **experiencing symptoms** of respiratory illness who have tested **negative** for **COVID**:

- Must remain off work until symptoms have improved or resolved and are fever-free for 24 hours.
- Upon return to work, must wear a mask up to and including day 10.

For additional guidance on communicable diseases contact email OHSWMatters@nshealth.ca or your zone Occupational Health Safety & Wellness department.

