

& MASKING GUIDANCE

2023-2024 RESPIRATORY VIRUS SEASON

PREAMBLE: Many respiratory viruses (including COVID-19) continue to circulate in our communities. Nova Scotia Health is continuing to track and evaluate available data to guide the most appropriate level of protective measures required to reduce the introduction and spread of these viruses in our facilities. These measures are designed to protect our patients, Essential Care Partners, families, visitors, learners, volunteers and Healthcare teams.

The following measures have been developed and updated on October 27, 2023. They will be revisited regularly and revised (as required) to address changes in the incidence and impact of respiratory viruses in our communities, and/or other health system pressures. Should it be necessary, more stringent protective measures may be introduced.

All clinical health care team members are reminded that the [Acute Viral Respiratory Infection Risk Assessment: Inpatient Settings and Emergency Departments](#) is required on all inpatients and the [Acute Viral Respiratory Infection Risk Assessment: Ambulatory Setting](#) is required on all ambulatory care patients. Staff are reminded of the importance of careful [Point of Care Risk Assessment](#) during ongoing interactions to determine the risk of exposure and appropriate [Routine Practices and Additional Precautions](#) required for safe care.

REMINDER TO STAFF AND ONSITE MEDICAL PHYSICIANS: DO NOT REPORT TO WORK IF FEELING UNWELL. If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID illness, follow the testing requirements as found on the [COVID-19 Status and Reason for Work Absence form](#). The staff member or physician should also complete the [NS Health Report and Support Form](#) when they book a PCR test or as soon as they test positive on a rapid COVID test. The Report and Support Form is used to assess risk for serious illness due to COVID-19, and if criteria are met, for medications that could reduce the risk of hospitalization.

| PPE | Required Measures |
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| <p>Note: Masking required upon entry to Nova Scotia Health acute care facilities (hospitals) in common/public areas such as hallways, elevators, staircases, and cafeterias. Masks and signage will continue to be available at entry. Symptomatic Essential Care Partners/Family/Visitors will not be permitted to enter.</p> | |
| <p>Masks: Clinical areas within NS Health acute care facilities</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical mask is required in all areas of the hospital where patients, visitors, and essential care partners may be present including nursing stations. • Medical masks are required for meetings in clinical areas including unit conference rooms. Food is not permitted in these areas. |

| PPE | Required Measures |
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| <p>Applies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthcare Workers Patients, Essential Care Partners/Family/Visitors Learners/Volunteers <p>Exceptions:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masks required by support service team members when providing services in the patient space and when transporting patients in hallways and common areas. Patients are required to wear a mask when outside of their bedspace/room as tolerated. Masks may be removed by healthcare workers in areas such as breakrooms when actively eating and drinking. Physical distancing should be maintained when masks are removed. Break areas should be assessed by leadership teams to ensure room capacity with physical distancing can be achieved. Masks may be removed by Essential Care Partners/Family/Visitors at the request of the patient while visiting at the bedside. In a shared room, curtain must be pulled around the bedspace when mask is removed. Masks must be donned when a healthcare worker enters the bedspace. |
| <p>Masks: upon entry and in common/public areas such as hallways, elevators, and cafeterias</p> <p>Applies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patients Essential Care Partners/Family/Visitors Healthcare Workers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medical mask is required in all areas of the hospital where patients/Essential Care Partners/Family/Visitors may be present. Masks may be removed in areas such as cafeterias when seated and when actively eating and drinking. Physical distancing should be maintained when masks are removed and must be worn when finished eating and drinking. |
| <p>Masks (LTC Facilities within NS Health).</p> <p>Applies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Designated Care Givers Healthcare workers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> These areas must adhere to the 2023-2024 guide-respiratory-virus-infection-outbreak-management-ltc.pdf (novascotia.ca) Masking is required for healthcare workers based on the point of care risk assessment and in consultation with the resident/family/designated care giver. A point of care risk assessment should be completed to inform the decision. |
| <p>Masks (non-clinical areas within NS Health acute care facilities)</p> <p>Applies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthcare workers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masking by Healthcare workers is recommended but not required in areas of the facility in which no patients/Essential Care Partners/Family/Visitors are present. Masking is recommended for team meetings held in spaces outside of clinical areas. Teams are encouraged to have virtual options for meetings. Large gatherings (>50 people) should be virtual where possible. When in-person large gatherings (>50 people) are required, masks are required. |

| PPE | Required Measures |
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| <p>Masks: other settings (non-NS Health acute care facilities)</p> <p>Applies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthcare workers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masking by NS Health staff during the delivery of programs or services in <u>non-NS Health acute care facilities</u> such as primary care and public health clinics, schools, community centers etc. is at the discretion of the healthcare worker in consultation with the patient/client. A point of care risk assessment should be completed to inform the decision to provide services without a mask. Masking by NS Health staff during the delivery of programs or services in private homes with people who are at high risk* of severe respiratory viral infection is required. (<i>*includes patients/clients >65yrs, those with moderate to severe immunocompromise, those who have not received ≥ 2 doses of COVID-19 or an annual High Dose Influenza vaccine. Also includes those < 6 months as these infants are at higher risk of severe viral respiratory infection.</i>) Masking by NS Health staff during the delivery of programs or services in private homes with people who are generally healthy and not at high risk* of severe respiratory viral infection (e.g. Public Health enhanced home visiting program, Early Intervention Program), is recommended. Masks should be worn during the initial encounter but may be removed at the request of the patient/client following point of care risk assessment. |
| Code Blue | <p>Apply droplet, contact and airborne precautions based on most recent Acute viral Respiratory Infection Risk Assessment: Inpatient Setting and Emergency Departments or based on Point of Care Risk Assessment (PCRA).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If risk assessment cannot be performed, apply droplet, contact and airborne precautions. |

| TRANSPORTATION | Required Measures |
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| Elevators | As per normal capacity. Masks required in hospital setting |
| Shuttle buses (employee and patient) | <p>All seats available and patient transport permitted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masks recommended. |

| TESTING | Required Measures |
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| Admission Testing | Based on most recent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acute Viral Respiratory Infection Risk Assessment: Inpatient Setting and Emergency Departments AND • NS Health Admission Pathway: Acute Viral Respiratory Infection Including COVID-19 AND • Point of Care Risk Assessment (PCRA) |
| Perioperative Testing and Outpatient pre-AGMP* Testing (*Aerosol generating medical procedure) | Based on most recent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acute Viral Respiratory Infection Risk Assessment: Inpatient Setting and Emergency Departments AND • Clinical Pathway: Perioperative: Decision and Management Protocol for Surgical Procedures Requiring General Anesthesia AND • Point of Care Risk Assessment (PCRA) |
| Inpatient pre-AGMP | Based on most recent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acute Viral Respiratory Infection Risk Assessment: Inpatient Setting and Emergency Departments AND • COVID-19 Testing Guidance Pre-AGMP AND • Point of Care Risk Assessment (PCRA) |

**Note: AGMP for patients with COVID-19 or other airborne transmissible infections (incl. TB) requires the use of airborne, droplet and contact precautions, including N95 Respirator and single room.*

| SCREENING | Required Measures |
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| Applies to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patients • Essential Care Partners, Family, Visitors | <p>Screening questions included with appointment letter or completed for appointments scheduled by phone. Screening questions to be completed within 48 hours prior to in-person appointment, if appointment notification by mail is not used. Outpatient Appointment Letter: Respiratory Virus Infections</p> <p>Patients, essential care partners, family members and visitors perform active screening for respiratory virus prior to entering a NS Health facility. Hand sanitizer and masks are available at facility entrances. Masking is encouraged and is required in inpatient units, emergency departments and designated ambulatory clinics.</p> <p>Patients, if symptomatic, MUST perform hand hygiene and don a mask upon entry. They must disclose their symptoms to the care team when they arrive at the unit, department or clinic and at the time of the Acute Viral Respiratory Infection Risk Assessment: Inpatient Settings and Emergency Departments and Acute Viral Respiratory Infection Risk Assessment: Ambulatory Setting</p> <p>Essential Care Partners, family members or visitors who are symptomatic should NOT enter NS Health facilities, even if they are only exhibiting one symptom.</p> |

| AMBULATORY PRACTICES | Required Measures |
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| Waiting Rooms | Up to 100% of seated capacity with medical mask required in hospital setting. No food or drink is permitted in waiting rooms unless provided under the direction of staff. |

| MEETINGS/GATHERINGS | Required Measures |
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| In-person meetings, small work team check-ins, educational sessions, and huddles in non-clinical areas (including simulation), where patients are not present | Permitted up to seated room capacity limits. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masking recommended. |
| Team meetings: unit daily huddles small work-team check-ins required for direct patient care or critical training, in clinical areas (including nursing stations) | Permitted up to seated room/area capacity limits. Masking required. No food permitted at nursing stations. |
| Patient groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in NS Health hospitals off-site | Permitted up to seated room/area capacity limits. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masking required. Masking recommended, can be required based on program leadership |
| Large meetings of >100 people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in NS Health hospitals off-site | Virtual option recommended. If required in person: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masking required. Masking recommended, can be required based on program leadership |
| Cafeteria seating | Normal capacity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masks required when not actively eating/drinking. |
| Break rooms | Permitted up to seated room/area capacity limit. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masking required when not actively eating or drinking. Physical distancing should be maintained when masks are removed. Break areas should be assessed by leadership teams to ensure room capacity with physical distancing can be achieved. |

| ADDITIONAL ON-SITE PEOPLE/SERVICES | Required Measures |
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| Volunteers | Permitted. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration will be given to limiting volunteer participation when necessary (e.g unit outbreaks) |
| Essential Care Partners/Family/Visitors | Permitted per Staff Guidance: Supporting safe visitation with patients in NS Health Facilities |
| Students and Learners (Including from accredited educational programs, job shadowing, student co-ops and “observerships”) | Permitted. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students and Learners must follow COVID-19 protocols as set forth by IPAC and OHSW and carried out within their educational program. Learners must follow all respiratory guidance while in NS Health Facilities/ placements. • Students and Learners are not permitted to enter NSH facilities if they have any ONE respiratory signs/symptoms. |
| External Contractors (including teachers, Instructors, facilities contract workers, building support vendors/repair personnel for fixed, in- place machinery/ patient care equipment) | Follow Covid-19 Guidelines for Contractors and Vendors Entering Nova Scotia Health Facilities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most responsible NSH leader to ensure external contractors follow masking and gathering guidelines while on site in NSH facilities. |
| Pet Therapy | Permitted in areas with an approved Pet Therapy Program; however: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not permitted in rooms of patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 or on units with a declared outbreak. • Masking required for handler when entering in-patient rooms. |

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH, SAFETY & WELLNESS

| HEALTHCARE WORKER GUIDANCE | Required Measures: COVID-19 Status and Reason for Work Absence Form |
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| Healthcare worker with symptoms of COVID-19 | Work exclusion and test 48 hours <u>after</u> symptom onset [PCR or POCT (rapid test)] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If PCR @48 hrs is negative, return to work provided symptoms are improved/resolved. • If POCT (rapid test) @48 hrs is negative, retest @72 hrs. Healthcare workers can return to work with 2 negative tests, provided symptoms are improved/resolved. However, if symptoms continue, retest @96 hrs. Healthcare workers can return to work with negative test provided symptoms are improved/resolved. |
| Healthcare worker with a positive COVID-19 PCR/POCT | Work exclusion for 7 days from the date of onset of symptoms or date of positive test, whichever comes first. Work isolation must be performed up to and including day 10. |
| Healthcare worker exposed to COVID-19 by a close contact (community) OR by a household contact | Healthcare worker can remain in the workplace but must perform work isolation protocols for 7 days after the last known contact with the positive community or household case. Work isolation includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • zero unprotected interactions with others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ no eating or drinking in shared spaces ○ masks at all times unless alone in a room • performing twice daily symptom screening • wearing personal protective equipment as per the patient point of care risk assessment • performing frequent hand hygiene |

| COVID-19 VACCINATION REQUIREMENTS | NS Health Policy: COVID-19 Immunization for Preferred Candidates, Employees and On-Site Medical Staff |
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| Primary Series | Required for all preferred candidates, employees, and on-site medical staff. Completion of Primary Series MUST be reported to OHSW via NS Health COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Form . |
| Additional eligible doses/boosters | Strongly encouraged and can be reported to OHSW via NS Health COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Form . |
| Vaccination Exceptions (medical, human rights) | May be granted. Requests for exceptions MUST be submitted via NS Health COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Form . |