

# Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

## Guidance to Help Make Continuous Masking Work for You

June 15, 2020

It is very important that we continue to work together to identify, implement and maintain strategies that will slow down and prevent transmission of COVID-19 illness to our patients, families and each other. Other countries have used continuous masking to curb the spread of the disease and Canada is following suit. Based on current scientific evidence, AHS implemented continuous masking in April. It remains in place.

**Continuous masking is required when a Healthcare Worker (HCW) is involved in direct patient contact or where a two-metre distance between patients and/or co-workers cannot be maintained.**

When continuous masking is required, HCWs in any AHS facility must:

- Wear medical/procedural masks at all times, provided by AHS, unless point of care risk assessment determines an N95 respirator is necessary.
- Perform hand hygiene before they put on the mask, and before and after removal.
- Wear the mask securely over their mouth and nose and adjust the nose piece to fit snugly. If the mask does not stay in place, there may be another option available. HCWs are encouraged to speak with their managers and CPSM.
- Not touch the front of mask while wearing it.
- Not dangle the mask under their chin, around their neck, off the ear, under the nose or place on top of head as doing so may lead to self-contamination or cross contamination to other devices or surfaces.
- Consistently follow the proper steps for donning, doffing and disposal of masks after wear. Insite has many resources describing proper masking: [Donning and Doffing](#).

We recognize continuous masking has been challenging for some HCWs. The guidance below offers some practical suggestions and considerations for front line staff.

### Skin

#### Skin Integrity

- Guidance compiled by the Nurses Specialized in Wound, Ostomy and Continence Canada (NSWOC) has a number of resources to support prevention, care and treatment of skin irritation related to PPE usage. Click here to link to this guidance: [NSWOC](#).
- AHS has guidance on “hand health” with respect to hand hygiene: [Hand Health](#).
- HCWs should consult with Workplace Health and Safety/Occupational Health and Safety for advice on individual concerns and needs.

#### Pressure Injuries

Preventing pressure injuries:

- Good nutrition and hydration is key to having healthy, resilient skin. A strong skin barrier provides the best defense against pressure injuries associated with continuous masking.
- Remove the mask when not required to prevent injury to the skin. Use proper hand hygiene as described above.

- Practice proper cleaning and moisturizing practices using lotions and creams provided by AHS.
- Skin protection products may be helpful where to protect areas of pressure where the skin is red but not broken. Contact CPSM for available options.
- HCWs should consult with Workplace Health and Safety/Occupational Health and Safety for advice on individual concerns and needs.

If pressure injuries have occurred:

- Remove the mask when not required to prevent further injury to the skin. Use proper hand hygiene as described above.
- Consider applying a skin protection product to prevent further skin breakdown. Contact CPSM for available options.
- If using a N95 respirator, consult Workplace Health and Safety/Occupational Health and Safety if:
  - the areas of non-intact skin affect the seal, or
  - skin protection products are applied where the respirator contacts the skin.
- It may be necessary to re-fit test to ensure the HCW is adequately protected. HCWs should consult with Workplace Health and Safety/Occupational Health and Safety for advice on individual concerns and needs.

## Masks

### Adjusting the mask

- Select the mask that best fits the face.
- Check the Insite [COVID-19 page](#) for tips and tricks associated with specific products, as new products are being brought in to AHS on a regular basis.

### Alternatives – masks with ties

- AHS has a limited supply of masks that can be tied behind the head. Contact CPSM for available options.

### Alternatives - Mask Extenders

- Mask extenders or “Ear Savers” have become more commonly used to relieve pressure behind the ear.
- Many of the Ear Savers in current use are difficult to clean which means the virus may remain on the surface. Touching the face after touching the extender may increase the chances that the HCW self contaminates with the virus.
- There are numerous devices in use and AHS is undertaking a review to ensure that they can be donned, doffed and reused safely.
- Ear Savers must NOT be used with N95 respirators as they may impact the fit and seal.

## Supplies

- AHS continues to source and distribute procedure masks from a number of existing and new suppliers.
- All new products are required to meet Canadian standards and safety measures, as well as pass a quality review. We understand and appreciate that staff will have preferences for comfort and fit based on particular masks and facial characteristics. For higher risk situations, it is recommended that staff use their preferred mask when available.

In order to track, trend and action concerns about masks or any PPE please complete and submit an AHS [Medical Device Incident or Problem Report](#) form.

For HCWs outside AHS, Covenant, APL and related entities, please email photos with the name of the product, manufacturer, manufacturer product code, lot/batch number, expiry date (when present), and a description of the problem or incident to [MDIP@ahs.ca](mailto:MDIP@ahs.ca).

## References

PHAC Technical Brief on Masking:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/technical-brief-masking-face-shields-full-duration-shifts-acute-healthcare-settings.html>

General:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-ppe-continuous-use-guidance-masking.pdf>

Congregate Living:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-ppe-continuous-masking-home-care-congregate.pdf>