

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Guidance to Help Make Enhanced Masking Work for You

October 2023

AHS has adopted an [Use of Masks to Prevent Transmission of COVID-19 Directive](#) to help prevent transmission of COVID-19 within our acute care facilities. This directive supports zone and site leadership to determine if enhanced masking for staff, physicians, midwives, students, volunteers, and contracted providers is necessary, and can include patient care areas, elevators/staircases/hallways, common areas, gift shops, and cafeterias where patient contact could occur in acute care facilities. This is a **requirement** in accordance with the directive. Decisions to implement enhanced masking will be based on several factors which consider rate of hospitalizations, number of outbreaks, occupancy, test positivity, and situational context.

Enhanced masking is a critical action taken by all AHS staff, physicians, volunteers and contractors to protect the health and safety of our patients and one another. Masking can function either as source control (being worn to protect others) or part of personal protective equipment (PPE) (to protect the wearer) to prevent or control the spread of COVID 19.

All AHS people must follow Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Routine Practices and Additional Precautions as required by Infection Prevention and Control Risk Assessment (IPCRA) to make decisions on what PPE to use in the routine care of patients.

Enhanced masking may be challenging for some AHS workers. To support our teams in wearing masks according to the directive, below are tips for all AHS workers to manage the discomfort that may come with enhanced masking.

Before contacting your Occupational Health Nurse or a Workplace Health and Safety Advisor, talk to your manager to identify which of the suggestions below apply to your work situation. Then try to work through the tips below in the order they appear.

Some of the suggestions listed may require time before you see improvements. If you still are not able to resolve the issue, please report in MySafetyNet. If an Occupational Health Nurse contacts you for follow up, they will ask if you have tried the strategies outlined.

AHS sources a variety of procedure mask options. All PPE products brought into use by AHS CPSM are subject to rigorous quality control checks. Our PPE products meet or exceed current safety standards.

Strategies for Managing Enhanced Masking Challenges

Alternative brands of masks

- Try an alternative brand of mask for a period of time to see if that resolves the issue.
- Managers should work with their local Contracting, Procurement & Supply Management (CPSM) representative to identify alternative brands that can be ordered.
- Try one change at a time when trying alternate masks.
- Trial each change for a minimum of two weeks before making a modification to gain a better idea of which brand will be most successful.

Masks with ties

Try a mask with ties to alleviate pressure points. Managers should contact CPSM for available options. Please note that a limited supply of masks with ties are available.

Mask extenders

- Try a mask extender or ear savers to relieve pressure behind the ear.
- Review [Tips on the Use of Mask Extenders](#) for recommended products and tips for use. Ear savers must NOT be used with N95 respirators. They may impact the fit and seal.

Skin

The [Nurses Specialized in Wound, Ostomy and Continence Canada](#) (NSWOC) website provides a number of resources to support prevention, care and treatment of skin irritation related to PPE usage.

Skin Integrity

- Take measures to ensure you have healthy, resilient skin. Good nutrition and hydration are key. A strong skin barrier provides the best defense against pressure injuries associated with masking.
- Practice proper cleaning and moisturizing practices using lotions and creams provided by AHS. Skin protection products may be helpful in protecting areas of pressure where the skin is red but not broken.
- Consider personal health, allergies, and skin conditions when choosing skin products.
- Contact CPSM for available options.
- Try a facial prophylactic dressing (not for use with N95). See [NSWOC](#).
- Remove the mask – only when it is not required - to prevent injury to the skin.

Consult with Workplace Health and Safety/Occupational Health and Safety for advice on individual concerns and needs.

Other things to try

- Is there a certain amount of time that the mask can be tolerated?
- Depending on the position and staffing levels, try rotating heavy-exertion and less demanding tasks.
- Change the mask frequently and use skin protection if needed.
- If these strategies are not successful, please connect with your manager.

Reporting mask related issues

- Notify your supervisor/manager immediately when an incident occurs.
- Report all incidents/injuries pertaining to masking, including pre-existing conditions exacerbated by masking in MySafetyNet.
- Report all issues related to masking equipment.
- In order to track, trend and action concerns about masks or any personal protective equipment (PPE), complete and submit an AHS [Medical Device Incident or Problem Report](#) form.
- For workers outside AHS, Covenant, APL and related entities, 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. Once you have reported, you will be contacted by an Occupational Health Nurse for next steps, which may include collaboration with Ability Management if required.

Resources

- [The Use of Masks to Prevent Transmission of COVID-19 Directive](#)
 - [Masking FAQ](#)
 - [Infection Prevention and Control Risk Assessment](#)
 - [Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) Frequently Asked Questions](#)
-