

November 06, 2020

Over the past week, Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry said it is an “expectation” that British Columbians wear non-medical masks in public, indoor spaces where distance cannot be maintained between individuals.

It's very important to recognize that our health care facilities are safe – we have comprehensive safety plans in place and we are well-versed in practising good infection prevention and control measures. Similarly, our administrative buildings are safe, and we have completed safety plans and conducted risk assessments to ensure we are taking steps to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 wherever possible. In addition, we continue to uphold the most important public health measures – staying home when we are sick, washing our hands and practising good respiratory etiquette.

However, as we have learned throughout the pandemic, wearing a mask can serve as an added layer of protection in areas where it's not always possible to physically distance, like the grocery store, in lunch rooms, in elevators or in small meeting rooms.

Therefore, in accordance with a [new Ministry of Health policy](#) regarding mask use in health care facilities, Island Health will now require that masks must be worn by all persons working in a clinical/patient care area including common areas and break rooms, unless eating and/or drinking. In addition, within health care facilities, for all persons working in non-clinical/patient care areas, a mask should be worn in any indoor space where people are unable to maintain two metres distance from each other. The policy defines health care facilities to include hospitals, health centres, physicians' offices and outpatient clinics.

The provincial policy is effective immediately. We acknowledge, however, that Island Health and all health authorities must work collaboratively on next practical steps related to implementation and compliance, ensuring staff, patients, clients and visitors understand what is expected and how to support each other. More information will be forthcoming.

Effective today, medical masks will be available in all Island Health clinical areas for any staff, patients and visitors who need them. Over the next few days, the formal Island Health procedures, education and communications plan will be finalized and shared with staff. Each of the clinical program areas are also working on their plans which will align with the overall Island Health and Ministry of Health policy, but will take into account the unique circumstances of each program.

There will be further communication to clarify and support implementation of this new policy over the coming days. While this new policy makes masking mandatory in health care facilities and any locations where health care services are provided, it does allow for some exceptions. To this end, we must remember that we do not know everyone's story. There may be reasons why someone is unable to wear a mask. Please continue to practice compassion, patience and understanding.

Thank you for ongoing commitment to provide excellent health and care, to everyone, everywhere, every time.