

Updated: November 10, 2020

MASKING POLICY AT ISLAND HEALTH: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This document will be updated with questions as they are presented. Check back for updates or send your question to pandemic@viha.ca.

Why is it necessary to wear a mask?

COVID-19 spreads mainly among people who are in close contact with one another (within approximately 2-metres), so the use of masks is particularly important in settings where people are close to each other or where physical distancing is difficult to maintain. Masks are one method of source control and are recommended as a barrier to droplets when people are coughing, sneezing or talking in raised voices. See also: CDC – [Use of Masks to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](#)

Why is it necessary to wear a medical grade mask in health care settings?

Medical Grade masks are standardized and have been tested and approved by Health Canada. There is a grade and pressure the medical mask can tolerate and the effectiveness of the protection has been measured. Cloth masks have not been standardized or tested in the same way.

Where do I get a mask when I get to work?

Staff and medical staff working in care facilities should bring a clean medical-grade mask with them for entry into the facility. Because of theft, these supplies are no longer available at staff entry points; therefore, we ask everyone to ensure they are prepared in advance.

Staff working in corporate, non-care facilities are asked to bring their own re-usable, non-medical, 3-layer cloth mask to work for use in common/shared spaces.

In both cases, if you do not have a medical-grade mask with you when entering a patient care facility, please enter via a main access point and obtain one from an Ambassador.

ORDERING: While supplies are available, Managers in non-care facilities can arrange for a supply of non-medical-grade masks, including cloth masks, for their staff by contacting ProcessImprovement@viha.ca.

For staff who need to transfer through or visit a health-care facility, please order medical-grade masks through regular Stores ordering processes ([complete a requisition](#), update your unit's top-up levels, or reach out to ProcessImprovement@viha.ca for additional guidance).

Who will have the final say if there are any doubts about whether to wear a mask?

If you are unsure whether you should wear a mask, based on the criteria in the table above, please err on the side of caution and wear a medical-grade mask – then speak with your leader or local [JOHS Committee](#) representative to get advice.

Who is responsible for enforcing this policy? I often see staff not wearing masks.

Leaders are responsible to ensure the safety of their staff and clients through adherence to this policy. Island Health's Occupational Health & Safety team is developing a process for auditing and reporting requirements. More will be shared on this as work develops.

Aren't my colleagues a part of my bubble?

Your bubble refers to your household members and your 'safe six' (friends and extended family) – and is referring to social activities outside of work. When at work, the COVID safety guidelines, including masking, need to be applied.

What is the correct way to hand out a clean mask to someone?

With clean hands, health care team members should pull a mask from the box and individually hand them out to patients and visitors. It should not be a self-serve approach.

How often should I change my medical-grade mask?

Masks should be replaced if they become wet or soiled. If you need to remove your mask to eat or drink, put a clean mask on after.

Is there a sign or poster that we can use for our building?

Yes. There is a [sign available](#) (pictured right) on our COVID-19 intranet page (under 'Signage'). To order, use a [form requisition](#) and quote the number 9-90819 – then email to printing@viha.ca.



Can staff still lunch together (with removed masks to eat) if our lunch areas don't provide enough room for 2-metres of space?

Staff need to maintain 2-metres of distance from one another when eating/drinking in common areas (while masks are off), which may require staff who are lunching/breaking at the same time to seek different spaces that provide adequate distancing on the site.

If we're attending an in-person meeting (i.e. morning rounds), do we all need to wear masks?

If the in-person meeting is conducted within a patient care facility, then masks must be worn. If the in-person meeting is in a non-care facility, then non-medical, 3-layer cloth masks must be worn.

If I'm working in my enclosed office within a health-care facility, do I need to wear a medical-grade mask?

If you are working alone in your office, then no. If you have a visitor or leave your office, yes.

As a Community Health Worker, I wear a mask to protect my clients. When will it be an expectation that clients and families wear a mask to protect us?

A medical-grade mask protects others - but it also protects ourselves. It is reasonable to ask families/visitors to give care providers physical distance and request they wear a mask - but we cannot mandate this within people's homes, so the best line of defense is to protect ourselves.

I work in a cubicle in a patient care facility – but away from care areas. Do I need to wear a mask all day?

If your cubicle is 2-metres from colleagues in your office, and/or you have adequate barriers in between, then you do not need to wear your mask while at your desk. You do need to wear a medical-grade mask if someone comes into your desk space, when in common areas with colleagues and when transitioning through other areas in your facility.

For more information:

- Read the [Ministry of Health Masking Policy](#) (November 4)