

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Updates to continuous masking for COVID-19

March 2023

The following information is meant to address questions you may have about Alberta Health Services [Use of Masks During COVID-19 Directive](#):

Effective March 6, 2023, masking became optional for AHS people in areas where there is no contact with or that is not accessible to patients or designated family/support persons. Continuous masking requirements remain in place for all other areas. We will continue to review masking in other areas and update this FAQ and other related documents accordingly. Thank you for your patience.

### General

#### 1. Why is this directive being revised?

- We continue to review our COVID-19 policies and directives including the [Use of Masks During COVID-19 Directive](#) as we move forward with pandemic recovery.
- This update is in alignment with masking requirements in public spaces and government facilities.
- The safety of our patients and our people remains our priority.
- We will continue to monitor the need for continuous masking to reduce the risk of respiratory illness.

#### 2. Who does this directive apply to?

- This directive applies to workers, physicians, volunteers, students and contractors at Alberta Health Services, Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL), Carewest sites and settings.

#### 3. Where do I need to wear a mask?

- AHS people are required to continuously mask in an AHS facility or setting when they are in an area where they may come into contact with patients, including residents and clients, or designated family/support persons such as:
  - Continuing care facilities
  - Residential treatment facilities
  - Patient care areas
  - Charting rooms
  - Elevators/staircases/hallways
  - Common areas
  - Gift shops
  - Cafeterias

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- Wherever required per the AHS [Point of Care Risk Assessment](#) (PCRA)

## 4. Where is masking optional?

- Wearing a mask is optional for AHS people in areas where they might not come into contact with patients or designated family/support persons such as:
  - Corporate settings
  - Health records departments
  - Clinical sites vacant or not yet commissioned
  - Administrative meetings/rooms in non-patient adjacent areas

## 5. Why does this update only apply to certain areas?

- We must take all the precautions we can to minimize the occurrence of outbreaks in patient settings as we continue to manage COVID-19 cases within patient care areas.
- Masking will remain in place for settings where there is patient contact as it is our priority to protect our vulnerable patient populations.

## 6. I am moving between patient care and non-patient care areas. What do I do?

- During your day, you may be in areas where you may come into contact with patients and designated family/support persons. Continue to mask in those areas.
- You do not need to continuously mask in areas where masking is optional. Refer to Question 4 for more details.

## 7. Do I need to mask in a break room?

- Workers do not need to wear a mask in break rooms.

## 8. I work in laboratory services. Do I need to mask?

- No, you do not need to wear a mask if there is no contact with a patient.
- Continue to wear the necessary personal protection equipment (PPE) as identified in your [Hazard Identification, Assessment and Control](#) (HIAC) in technical laboratory spaces.
- Refer to [APL Patient Facing PPE Guideline COVID-19](#) for detailed scenarios.

## 9. I work in a warehouse. Do I need to mask?

- No, workers do not need to wear masks in warehouses or stores.
- Workers must wear a mask if they are entering a patient care area as part of the delivery.

## 10. Do workers in medical device reprocessing departments have to mask?

- Workers must wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect themselves from [blood and body fluid exposure](#) (BBFE) in decontamination areas, and when transporting equipment (clean or soiled) to and from patient care areas.

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- Workers do not need to mask in clean or assembly areas of a medical device reprocessing department.

## **11. If I work in an area that does not require continuous masking, do I need to mask if I am returning to work after a five-day work restriction due to testing have tested positive for COVID-19 or having COVID-19 symptoms? **\*\*NEW\*\*****

- Regardless of the area you work in, if you are returning to work after having COVID-19 symptoms and/or a positive test, you must continuously mask and perform thorough hand hygiene for 10 days following the onset of their COVID-19 symptoms, or for 10 days following the date of your first positive test if you remain asymptomatic, when working in any AHS setting where you are going to be in contact with other people (e.g., other workers, patients, visitors, members of the public).
- Please refer to the [Attending Work with COVID-19 Symptoms or a Positive COVID-19 Test](#) and the corresponding [FAQ](#) for further guidance.

## **12. How does this impact visitors and non-AHS workers in AHS facilities/settings?**

- Visitors are not required to mask when they are in an area where there is no contact with patients (e.g. corporate settings, health records departments, clinical sites vacant or not yet commissioned).
- Visitors are required to continuously mask in an AHS facility or setting when they are in an area where they may come into contact with patients or other designated family/support persons.
- See [masking guidance](#) for designated family/support persons and visitors for more information.

## **13. Do workers have to wear a mask when receiving visitors in areas where there is no contact with patients?**

- No, workers are not required to mask when they are in an area where they might not come into contact with patients including corporate settings.

## **14. Will I still have to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)? **\*\*UPDATED\*\*****

- Yes, mandatory PPE is still required in situations where direct care is provided. Please refer to the AHS [Point of Care Risk Assessment](#) (PCRA) for all protective personal equipment (PPE) decisions.
- Where continuous masking is no longer required per the Use of Masks During COVID-19 Directive, the requirements for PPE as dictated by local [Hazard Identification, Assessment and Control](#) (HIAC) and safe work procedures do not change.

## **15. Is physical distancing still required in areas where masking is not required?**

- No, physical distancing is not required in areas where masking is not required.

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## 16. There has been an outbreak declared at my site. What do I do?

- Follow directions from the outbreak management team.
- Refer to our [guides](#) on outbreak management.
- Outbreak prevention and management protocols outweigh the masking directive.

## 17. There are different beliefs and comfort levels about masking on my team. What should I do?

- Continuous masking has been challenging for some AHS workers. To support our teams in wearing masks at all times where required and manage the discomfort that may come with continuous masking, please see the [guide for making continuous masking work for you](#).
- Having a difference of opinion is a normal and expected part of [working together](#), and each of us has personal values and beliefs that influence how we act and respond to situations.
- Stay [respectful](#) and maintain a productive and professional relationship.
- [Keeping an open dialogue](#) when differences occur can support workplaces that are safe, healthy, and respectful for everyone.
- Talk to your manager about your concerns and [explore safety measures](#), if needed.
- Those who are unable to mask speak with their manager, as per the [AHS Workplace Accommodation Policy](#).

## Contact information

### 18. I have more questions. Who do I contact?

- Email [ppe@ahs.ca](mailto:ppe@ahs.ca).
- Contact your HRBP Advisor or WHSBP Advisor if you have additional questions.