

Masking

One-day Masking for Patient-facing Employees

Since we began universal masking in early April, we have been working hard to secure sources of ear-loop masks and have asked all of you to conserve masks when you can. Through the efforts of the NMSA team and all of you, we now are able to return patient-facing employees to one-mask-a-day usage. Patient-facing employees are employees who are within 6 feet of patients as part of their regular work.

What this means for you:

- Patient-facing employees can change out their masks at the beginning of each shift.
 - Please take your mask off at the end of your shift and put it into its paper bag as you have been doing. Wear that mask into the building where you work the next day and obtain a new one as you begin your shift.
 - If your mask becomes soiled, torn, or difficult to breathe through, please get a new mask from your manager.
- Non-patient facing employees should continue to wear their mask for 3 to 5 shifts.
 - If your mask becomes soiled, torn, ill-fitting or difficult to breathe through, please get a new mask from your manager.
- Cloth masks are still allowed in the following situations:
 - Staff who are not patient-facing
 - Patients and visitors who do not have symptoms of illness (answer screening questions negatively)

Anyone who is currently eligible to wear a cloth mask may continue to do so. If you qualify for a cloth mask but would prefer to wear an ear-loop mask, you are welcome to one — please ask your manager.

We are confident in our supply of ear-loop masks and will keep you informed about supply moving forward. More challenges will come but we want to thank you for your continuing flexibility as we work through the changes brought on by COVID-19!

Masking Patient Masking in Rooms

If a patient is in a private room and no one else is in the room with them, they can remove their mask. However, if someone wants to enter their room, the patient should put their mask back on before that person enters. For patients sharing a room, both patients should be masked at all times unless they are eating.

Masking for Pediatric Patients

At this time, children under the age of 2 should not be masked.

Use and Distribution of Hand-Sewn Masks

Over the past few weeks, Munson Healthcare has received more than 1,000 hand-sewn masks generously donated from our communities. At today's Clinical Incident Command, a recommendation for distribution and use of these masks was approved.

The three categories approved for use of hand-sewn masks are:

- **Food & Nutrition (Dietary) staff** – this will address the issue of surgical masks degrading in the kitchen environment. These employees will receive two masks to allow laundering between uses due to the nature of their work.
- **Non-patient facing staff members who work in buildings designated as “patient care spaces”** – this includes ambulatory clinics staff who do not directly interact with patients, administrators, human resources, billing, HIM, etc. that can maintain 6 feet of social distance while at work.
- **Patients who do not have COVID-19** – this includes inpatients, home health clients, outpatients (especially recurring patients such as those in infusion/cancer care/dialysis/therapy/etc.), and ambulatory clinic patients.

Members of the Healthcare Team listed in the bullets above may choose to use either their own hand-sewn masks or the donated masks. Patients and visitors without COVID-19 symptoms are encouraged to wear their own hand-sewn or purchased masks if they have them, and reuse them for each visit.

To reduce the spread of infection:

- Keep your mask in a paper bag when you are not wearing it, such as when you are eating or drinking, or after your shift.
- When putting on your mask – sanitize your hands, take the mask out of the bag, put the mask on, and sanitize your hands again.
- When taking off your mask – sanitize your hands, take off the mask and place in the bag, sanitize your hands again.
- Wash the hand-sewn mask daily.

NMSA has been working with each entity Incident Command to distribute the laundered hand-sewn masks.

Providers and staff that work in non-patient care buildings may also wear their own hand-sewn masks; however, masks will not be provided at this time.

N95 Mask Guidelines and Replacement Procedure N95 masks are only for employees who are working directly with patients in Airborne Precautions. Please follow the [Guidelines for Reuse of N-95 Mask](#).

Important note: All masks need to be handled carefully. Follow these important practices:

1. **DO NOT WEAR MAKEUP**, including foundations, creams, lipstick, or lip gloss. They degrade the mask and render them useless for processing and sanitizing.
2. Cloth masks should **not** be worn over an N95 mask. It causes it to degrade.
3. When putting on and taking off an N95 mask, sanitize your hands, take off the N95 and place in the bag, sanitize your hands again.

All N95 masks should be returned whether they appear to be reusable or not.

FOR MMC PROVIDERS: All N95 masks will be collected and assessed for potential processing and sanitizing for reuse. The procedure to replace an N95 mask is as follows: use Smart Web to page **N95 Replacement** and a fit tester will contact you to arrange for mask replacement and additional fit testing, if needed. Place mask in a plastic, sealed bag with no holes. Give your used N95 mask to the fit tester.

FOR ALL OTHER MHC HOSPITAL PROVIDERS: All N95 masks will be collected in the collection bins and assessed for potential processing and sanitizing for reuse.

Munson Healthcare Leadership is committed to doing everything possible to keep you safe while serving patients with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19. More info

Cloth Masks Should Not Be Worn Over Surgical Masks

If you are wearing a cloth mask over a **surgical mask**, please discontinue this practice immediately. We have received reports from frontline staff and Infection Prevention that wearing a cloth mask over a surgical mask will cause them to degrade. We are also receiving reports that wearing a cloth mask over a N95 mask could trap unwanted moisture and cause friction that could degrade and make them less effective.

As always, the safety of our Healthcare Team is our top priority. Clinical experts are meeting continuously to review new information as it becomes available, including feedback from frontline staff. More information will be communicated in the near future related to the proper use and reuse of N95 masks, who should wear homemade masks, and how homemade masks should be worn. These are unprecedented times, and we understand that there is conflicting information being shared online and in the media on the effectiveness of homemade masks, best use cases, and their ability to extend the life of surgical masks and N95 respirators. Please continue to follow the clinical guidelines that have been communicated to you to ensure your safety.

Reprocessing Guidelines for N95 Masks

N95 masks, which are in critically short supply, are being collected post-use. We are working to identify ways to safely reprocess these items for future use so please do not throw them away.

When your N95 mask is no longer usable, return the mask and obtain a new or reprocessed one. At Munson Medical Center, page “N95 Replacement” (in SmartWeb) or “3181893” to request a replacement N95 mask. At all other sites, please follow your hospital’s procedure for mask exchange.

Reprocessing bins are being placed in specific locations at each site. Unit managers can provide instructions at your location. The Central Processing department at each location is sterilizing these supplies following industry guidelines, and then they will be redistributed.

If you’re unsure of where to return your N95 masks, please ask the unit manager.

Universal Masking FAQs

Do I need to keep my mask and bring it with me to the hospital?

Yes. As you leave the hospital, go to the screener station, sanitize your hands, remove the mask, put the mask back in your bag, and sanitize your hands again. Bring your mask back with you.

When you enter the hospital, go to the screener station, sanitize your hands, take your mask out of the bag, put it on and adjust as necessary, and sanitize your hands again.

DO NOT leave your mask in the bag at the hospital. Masking begins when you enter the screener station.

Should all patients be wearing face masks?

Yes, patients should wear a surgical mask in any waiting area and any time someone else is in their room. Please ensure that patients receive masks on the unit. If a patient is alone in their room, they may take off the mask. When taking their mask off, they should place their mask in the bag and sanitize their hands. To put the mask back on, they should sanitize their hands, take the mask out of the bag, put the mask back on their face, and sanitize their hands again. Patients and visitors may wear a Munson Healthcare issued mask OR their own hand-sewn or purchased masks as long as they are clean and not torn.

Should all visitors be wearing face masks?

Yes, all visitors are expected to wear a mask when in a clinical facility other than when eating or drinking. They will receive a surgical mask and paper bag at the screener station and will be asked to use it again if they return to the facility. Patients and visitors may wear a Munson Healthcare issued mask OR their own hand-sewn or purchased masks as long as they are clean and not torn.

Can a member of the Healthcare Team wear a homemade mask?

Thanks to the community support and our Supply Chain efforts, Munson Healthcare has an adequate, but not inexhaustible, supply of approved masks for our Healthcare Team. After clinical review, homemade or hand-sewn masks have been deemed inappropriate for health care staff use. All homemade items received at an approved Munson Healthcare drop-off site will be properly laundered and made available to asymptomatic patients and visitors as quantities allow.

Moving forward, hand-sewn masks will be a valuable resource for asymptomatic patients and visitors. Patients and visitors may wear a Munson Healthcare issued mask, hand-sewn or purchased masks as long as they are clean and not torn. We are grateful to our many community members for their tireless efforts in making these hand-sewn items for patients, visitors or the public. Hand-sewn masks align with the new Federal Government recommendations advising the use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the virus.

Why are we moving to universal masking?

Given what we have learned about COVID-19, this universal mask approach will serve to:

1. Protect our Healthcare Team, patients and visitors if a healthcare worker has asymptomatic COVID-19 infection or develops symptoms while at work (a mask achieves source control and decreases the risk of spreading infection).
2. Protect our Healthcare Team should they come in close contact with an individual with either asymptomatic or mild COVID-19 infection or who has symptoms that have not yet been recognized.

Why are we recommending a surgical mask and not an N95 respirator?

Similar to influenza and other respiratory viruses, COVID-19 appears to be transmitted primarily through large respiratory droplets. Surgical masks protect against respiratory droplet spread. Wearing surgical masks in a more generalized manner may help to prevent spread from persons with asymptomatic shedding or persons with very mild disease. Finally, wearing a surgical mask helps contain respiratory secretions and may prevent an infected provider from spreading the virus to patients or coworkers.

In contrast, N95 respirators are used in clinical situations where aerosolization is occurring. This is for specific clinical situations, such as when a patient is intubated or undergoes bronchoscopy.

Does the universal mask policy apply to every member of the Healthcare Team, patients and visitors throughout the Munson Healthcare system?

The universal mask policy applies to all areas where clinical care is provided. We have defined these areas as all locations in our hospitals, ambulatory clinics, community health centers, Home Health and Hospice House.

Healthcare Team members working in buildings where no clinical care is provided should not wear masks in order to conserve stock for patient care. These employees should practice social distancing, respiratory etiquette, and frequent hand hygiene.

Important Masking Information

Masks Required for Ambulatory Patients/Outpatients

A reminder that Munson Healthcare remains in a pandemic response state. [Visiting restrictions](#), including those for surgical and procedural patients, remain in place in all of our hospitals including health screenings and universal masking. For the safety of our patients, visitors, and Healthcare Team, all patients and visitors to our facilities must wear a face mask unless there is a specific medical exception (see article below). If a patient chooses to not wear a mask due to personal preference, the patient will be asked to reschedule the appointment or moved to a telehealth visit. The mask must be worn at all times during the patient's visit except when eating or drinking. For more information, read the [mask guidelines](#).

Patients Who Can't Wear Masks

Some of our providers and staff have encountered patients who can't wear masks. Reasons for this may include dementia, mental health issues, pediatric patients, or some patients with respiratory conditions. Should you need to treat a patient who can't wear a mask, please **wear a mask and a face shield** for the entirety of the patient encounter.

If your unit/facility needs face shields, please let your manager know or the person who orders supplies for your department.

Additionally, the following steps are important to follow for outpatients:

- When scheduling an appointment with a patient, ask during the phone screening process about their ability to wear a mask.
- If possible, convert the appointment to telehealth vs. in-person.
- If telehealth is not appropriate, ask the patient to call when they arrive and wait in their car.
- When ready, the patient should be escorted directly to an exam room and the door closed.
- Provide tissues to the patient in case they need to sneeze or cough.
- Again, all members of the Healthcare Team who need to interact with this patient must **wear a mask and a face shield**.
- When the patient's appointment is over, they should be escorted directly to the exit.

Reminder: Masks are Not to Be Worn Below the Chin

Munson Healthcare's mask policy prohibits pulling your mask down below your chin and is based on CDC, WHO, and APIC guidelines.

- Once a mask is worn, the outside is considered contaminated and should not be touched except with proper doffing and donning techniques. Putting the mask down below the chin does not lend to proper technique.
- Masks should be removed properly before eating or drinking to ensure contamination does not occur. If the mask is pulled down below the chin while eating or drinking it can be soiled, requiring replacement. Instead, put your mask in your brown paper bag (consider keeping it in your pocket for easy access) or place it outside side down on a tissue or napkin while you eat.
- Remember to follow proper [doffing and donning procedures](#) and use hand sanitizer.

If you see someone wearing their mask below the chin, **Support the Team** with **Peer Checking** or **Peer Coaching** and remind them of the proper way to wear and store their mask. Reinforcing best practices and discouraging unsafe practices is the best way to protect ourselves, our patients, and our entire Healthcare Team.

Clarification – Outpatients/Visitors Wearing Valved N95 Masks

As we reported yesterday, we have seen patients and visitors coming into our facilities wearing valved N95 masks (see photo below). The reason we don't want people wearing valved masks is because they don't filter the air for exhalation.

Valved masks only filter the air when you're breathing in, but don't filter any respiratory droplets or viral particles when you're breathing out. Because of this, these valved masks do not protect everyone around you.

Should a patient or visitor arrive with a valved masks, they need to put a surgical or hand-sewn mask over it, or use an MHC-issued mask instead.

