Required Extended Mask Use Policy
FAQs

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1. Why are we requiring extended mask use (procedure masks)?

We are continuing to learn new information as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves and are focused on the safety of our patients and SCCA staff. The physical distancing measures put into place in March have been effective in “flattening the curve” in our region. In the coming weeks, we anticipate a transition to less restrictive physical distancing measures in the community and a gradual increase in outpatient visits, procedures, and surgical volumes. There is concern that these changes may lead to increased transmission of COVID-19 in the community and thus we need to put other tools in place to protect our patients and staff.

In addition, there continues to be accumulating evidence that some people can be infected without having symptoms or prior to developing symptoms. Symptomatic transmission remains the most frequent source of infection, however, data indicates that the virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity in the absence of symptoms or at times when their symptoms are mild. Masking at all times will reduce exposure and transmission, especially from individuals in the pre-symptomatic phase of their illness.

This masking policy aims to enhance:

- **Patient safety:** If an SCCA staff member has asymptomatic infection or very mild symptoms of infection that are either hard to recognize or develop during their shift at work, the face mask can contain viral particles and decrease the risk to patients and to other staff in close proximity.

- **Workforce safety:** If an SCCA staff member comes into close contact with an individual (patient, visitor, staff) who either has no signs of infection or an unexpected respiratory symptoms in a patient not in droplet/contact isolation, these masks may provide some additional level of protection against infectious droplets from those individuals. Since it is difficult in many work environments to maintain 6 feet of separation, masks can provide additional protection while working in the clinic.

Importantly, we believe this policy will also support our center wide efforts at PPE conservation. Our mask stockpile at SCCA is not unlimited, so all staff are entrusted with thoughtful and judicious use of their masks.

2. Why are we requiring a procedure mask and not an N95 respirator?

COVID-19 is thought to be transmitted primarily through droplets. A procedure mask provides protection by containing these droplets if someone has the virus and by preventing exposure to the virus if someone has close contact with another person who is infected. N95 respirators are used by nurses and providers caring for COVID-19 positive patients in the ICU and locations where aerosol generating procedures are common.
As a reminder, airborne/respirator/contact (with eye protection precautions) are only required while the patient is undergoing aerosol-generating procedures (e.g. intubation, nebulizer therapy). An N95 respirator is not required to prevent droplet transmission during routine care.

3. **Does the Required Extended Mask Use policy apply to every member of the workforce working anywhere at SCCA?**

YES. This policy applies to employees working in all SCCA buildings and premises, clinical and non-clinical locations (SCCA South Lake Union Campus, Evergreen Clinic, Issaquah Clinic, Poulsbo Clinic).

For employees working in non-clinical locations:
- Procedure masks are not recommended. If these employees visit buildings where clinical care is provided, the mask policy applies as above, and a procedure mask will be required while in clinic locations.
- Employees who are not required to be in clinical spaces should not enter the clinic.
- These employees should practice principles of social distancing (separation by 6 feet whenever possible), respiratory etiquette and frequent hand hygiene.
- These employees may choose to wear facial protection (e.g. cloth masks) brought in from home while in the non-clinical building.
- Symptomatic employees should not come to work sick, even if not in the clinical environment. They should perform daily self-checks before coming to clinic to assure they have no symptoms of COVID-19. Those who have new onset symptoms should fill out the [employee health online survey](#) to undergo testing at the employee drive through/walk-up clinic.

4. **What if I don’t want to wear a procedure mask?**

**This policy applies to all SCCA personnel** and is **required**. The requirement to wear a mask is part of Infection Prevention’s transmission-based precautions. Similar to the requirement to use hand hygiene – wearing an extended-use mask is not optional.

5. **What should I do if I develop a skin or breathing reaction to the procedure mask?**

Please remove your mask, inform your supervisor or manager, complete an Accident Illness Report (AIR) and contact the employee health team. That team will investigate the potential reaction and, if appropriate, attempt to find an alternative mask made with different components.
6. **Can I bring my own mask?**

If you work at an SCCA clinical location, we request that you **do not wear masks from home in the clinic**. SCCA will provide masks to all employees in our clinical areas at this time. You are welcome to wear a cloth mask to and from work but should exchange for a procedure mask on arriving to the clinic.

If you work in SCCA non-clinical locations (e.g. administrative buildings), you are expected to wear a cloth face covering when within 6ft of another person. You may wear a cloth face covering from home or a cloth mask supplied by SCCA.

7. **Should all patients be wearing face masks?**

YES. All patients entering SCCA facilities are strongly encouraged to wear their own cloth face covering when entering the healthcare facility. If they do not have a face cover or mask, one will be provided for them.

**(Symptomatic patients will be provided a procedure mask during front door screening and further evaluated.** Once roomed, symptomatic patients should continue to wear the face mask. The mask can be removed to perform a nose, mouth, or throat exam. Asymptomatic patients may choose to wear a mask they bring from home (e.g. cloth mask or scarf).

8. **Should visitors be wearing face masks?**

YES. Visitors are strongly encouraged to wear face masks or face coverings that they bring with them. If a visitor arrives without a mask, they will be offered procedure mask to wear. The visitor restriction policy limits visitors within our facilities. If a visitor develops symptoms while on the premises, that person should be provided a face mask and asked to leave.

9. **I work in a procedural area. Can I wear a single procedure mask continuously, including across different cases?**

YES. A single procedure mask can be worn across different patient cases. A mask must be changed, however, if it becomes wet or contaminated during a case. It is recommended that face shields be worn with masks in procedure areas.
10. Can I use my face mask between patients, including those with confirmed COVID-19, suspected COVID-19, other respiratory viruses or patients in whom none of these apply?

YES. Your face mask must be handled carefully to prevent both self-contamination and cross-contamination. Under conditions of extended use or reuse, a full-face shield must be worn over the face mask when caring for patients in droplet/contact precautions as the form of eye protection and to reduce potential splatter to the mask. Masks must be changed, however, if they become wet or contaminated.

11. I work in a clinical setting. How can I drink when I am supposed to wear a mask??

Drinking water or beverages are only permitted in designated areas. If you need to drink, ensure you are 6 feet away from others, perform hand hygiene, remove the mask, drink, and then replace your face mask. Always perform hand hygiene after replacing your mask, and be cautious not to touch the front of your mask when placing it back on.

12. How do I handle the mask when I’m ready to eat/drink during a break?

Eating is not permitted in clinical areas. On your break in a non-clinical area follow the steps below.

**Remove the mask:**
1. Perform hand hygiene with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub
2. Prepare paper bag.
3. Remove the face mask by grabbing strings by ears and carefully removing mask from face.
4. Store mask carefully to avoid contamination to other surfaces.
5. Perform hand hygiene with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.

**After you have finished eating or drinking, take the following steps to replace the mask:**

1. Perform hand hygiene with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
2. Remove mask carefully and don mask ensuring clean side is to your face, taking care to avoid touching face or eyes.
3. Perform hand hygiene with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer

**DO NOT pull the mask off your face around your neck to drink, this will lead to contamination.**
13. Are staff expected to go outside of the clinic premises to eat or are they allowed to take off their masks to eat while on clinic premises?

Staff can take off their masks to eat and drink when they are on premises in a location where they can maintain a distance of 6 feet. It is preferable to minimize going outside to the extent possible to prevent the need to discard masks and to help SCCA preserve mask supplies.

14. Can staff gather in break rooms and other places to eat and relax, and if so, should they leave their masks on?

Staff should adhere to the same principles of physical distancing when together in break rooms, conference rooms or other spaces. They should allow 6 feet distance from others and should take the appropriate precautions involving hand hygiene and not touching their faces. Masks can be taken off in such areas for eating and drinking. It is crucial to keep the number of people in a break room limited, so managers and staff should consider staggering their break times to avoid crowding.

15. “I spilled something on my mask” “My mask is soiled” “The ear loop of my mask broke”, etc.

Staff whose mask becomes soiled after continuous usage during the day can request a new mask from their manager. Be cautious with your mask to help SCCA preserve mask supplies.

16. If I need to leave the facility and come back later in my shift, what should I do?

Every effort should be made to limit exit and entry to the facility during your shift to preserve supplies of face masks. If you leave the facility, the face mask must be discarded and a new one obtained upon re-entry. You are strongly encouraged to use your own homemade/cloth face mask when outside of the facility and within 6 feet of another person.

17. Should employees be wearing the mask at home and should their families wear masks?

Employees should discard their procedure masks when leaving at the end of their shift and perform hand hygiene after removing their mask. They should not wear them home. Employees and their families may choose are encouraged to wear cloth face masks/coverings outside of the SCCA.

The Washington State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that people wear cloth face coverings when they are in public settings where they cannot maintain 6 feet of distance from others. This might include trips to the grocery store, pharmacy, hardware store, health clinic or similar places.
This recommendation is not a substitute for existing guidance to maintain 6-feet of physical distance from non-household members and performing frequent hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Wearing cloth face coverings will not prevent spread of COVID-19 without these other protective measures.

18. Can I wear my mask out of the clinic and use it on the bus or if I am going to a place where there will be other people?

NO. The mask needs to be discarded as you are leaving the clinic. It should not be worn on public transportation or in other places outside the clinic. Staff are strongly encouraged to wear cloth face coverings in public settings outside of the SCCA where they cannot maintain 6 feet physical distance. As above, Washington DOH and CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other physical distancing measures are difficult to maintain.