Wearing a Mask in the Hospital: Information for Patients, Family Caregivers, and Visitors

To prevent the spread of COVID-19 and keep everyone at the hospital safe, we are asking **all patients, family caregivers, and visitors to wear a mask or face covering while in the hospital.**

As you enter the hospital, you will meet with screening staff. If you do not have your own mask or face covering, or the staff determines that the mask you are wearing is not effective, we will hand you a mask to wear. Please clean your hands with hand sanitizer before and after putting your mask on. If you have a child, 6 years of age or older, coming in for a test, clinic visit, or emergency, we will also give them a mask to wear.

Why are we asking everyone to wear a mask?

While physical distancing (staying more than 2 metres (6 feet) apart from each other) is the most important way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 from person to person, there is very limited space at the hospital to do this safely. For example, in waiting areas and treatment rooms, it may be difficult to keep 2 metres away from others. That is why we are asking that all patients, family caregivers, and visitors wear a mask **at all times while in the hospital.**

How does a mask protect others and me?

By wearing a mask, you are *protecting others* around you by limiting the spread of the droplets that you release when you are coughing, sneezing, and speaking. You are also *protecting yourself* by reducing the chance of breathing in droplets from others who are within 2 metres of you.

When must I wear a mask?

Patients:	You must wear your mask if you:
	• **Are in any public space** (for example, anywhere on level 0 and level 1).
	• **Are in a treatment room** (for example, for a test, clinic visit, or in the Emergency Department).
	• **Are leaving your inpatient room** (for example, if you are going for a test in another department).
	Exceptions:
	• Your child may remove their mask while in the treatment room, but they must put it back on when a healthcare provider is in the room.
	• If we have admitted you to the hospital and you are staying overnight, you may remove your mask while you are in your own inpatient room.

Family caregivers and visitors:	**You must wear your mask at all times while you are in the hospital**. This includes all public spaces, as well as when you are alone with your loved one in the treatment area or in their hospital room.

A member of the staff may remind you to wear your mask. A nurse or manager will speak with you if you do not do so.

As the number of patients gradually increases at HRH, we ask that all patients, family caregivers, and visitors stay in their treatment area or inpatient room to reduce their risk and ensure a safe distance from others.

How do I keep myself/my child safe while wearing the mask?

To keep yourself or your child safe while wearing a mask:

- Wear your patient identification armband at all times. Healthcare staff will use the ID band to confirm you or your child's identity before providing any procedure or treatment. It is more difficult for your care provider to recognize your face while you are wearing a face mask or face covering.

- Speak to your nurse if your mask becomes very wet, soiled, or damaged, or you have dropped it on the floor. Your mask may no longer be effective in reducing the spread of droplets. We will provide you with a new mask to wear.

Please tell a member of the staff right away if you have:

- Increased difficulty breathing
- Anxiety/fear

Please tell a member of the staff right away if your CHILD has:

- Increased difficulty breathing
- Introduced germs to their face by adjusting or moving the mask often (most likely to happen in very young children)
- Reduced ability to communicate
- Anxiety/fear.

How do I put the mask on and take the mask off?

Please refer to the poster with instructions on putting on and taking off a mask properly and safely. You can also ask our staff to teach you how to properly put on and take off the mask.

How do I know if the mask fits properly?

The mask fits properly if it:

- Covers your mouth and nose once the elastics are secure around your ears.
- Fits tightly but comfortably. There should be only minimal gaps between your face and the mask while you are wearing it.
- Does not need to be repositioned or adjusted.
- Can be removed easily and safely.

If the mask does not fit properly, it is not protecting you and those around you.

What do I do with the mask after I take it off?

Follow the instructions on the poster to remove the mask safely and properly.

- If you are wearing a **disposable mask**, please throw it away in a waste container when you no longer need it.
- If you are wearing a **reusable face covering**, place it on a clean piece of paper towel, zip-lock bag, or inside a plastic container.

To keep reusable face coverings clean, wash it every day with warm water and laundry detergent. Clean the container at least once a day with soap and water plus an alcohol or disinfectant wipe. It is important to let both dry completely after cleaning.

Why do I see some patients/family caregivers/visitors not wearing a mask?

The person might have a medical or health reason why they are not wearing a mask. If you see someone without a mask, try to stay 2-metres apart even if you are wearing a mask.

Why do I have to wear a mask now if I did not have to wear a mask the last time I was here?

As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, so do the practices at HRH and other hospitals. We believe that asking patients, family caregivers, and visitors to wear masks will help keep all our patients, families and staff safe during this challenging time.

Masks and Children

Does my child need to wear a mask?

Masking for children depends on many factors, including age, ability, willingness, and safety.

Children, 6 years of age and older:	In general, we will ask patients, 6 years of age and older, to wear a mask. However, if your child is not able or willing to wear a mask, then they will not have to do so. You know your child best, including what they can and cannot do. • If your child wears the mask, will they be able to avoid touching, adjusting, or playing with the mask? • Is your child sensitive to new types of clothing/coverings? We understand that not all children, regardless of age, will be able or willing to wear a mask. In these cases, your healthcare team will speak to you about possible alternatives.
Children, 2 years of age and younger:	For safety reasons, we will not put a mask on a child younger than 2 years of age. At this age: • There is a higher chance of introducing germs to their face when touching or moving the mask. • There is a risk of choking or strangulation. • The child is less able to understand how to wear a mask properly. • The child cannot easily communicate if they become distressed. Please speak with your healthcare provider if you have any questions.

How can I help my child understand that wearing a mask is important for them and others?

Masks can be confusing to children, depending on their age. Try age appropriate explanations, play therapy, and role modelling to help kids accept and wear their masks.

• For younger children, you can focus on what germs are and how masks can help keep them away.
• For older children, answer their questions in simple language that they will understand. Tell them that when people are sick, they wear a mask. When they are better, they stop.

If you need help with talking to your child, ask a staff member for help. Our Child Life specialists have also created videos on masking and other topics that your child can watch.