

**Update Regarding Masking Acute Care and Outpatient Clinic Settings
As of 6/29/2023**

**Update from the Ad Hoc Working Group¹ on the Continuation of Masking in Healthcare Facilities
Coordinated by the Northwest Healthcare Response Network.**

In early 2023, the Northwest Healthcare Response Network convened subject matter experts from across western Washington to discuss the April 3, 2023, removal of the Secretary of Health Mask Order requiring universal masking in healthcare, long-term care, and adult correctional facilities for people aged 5 years and older. Healthcare organizations in our region began working together to establish an approach for continued masking in healthcare facilities in response to the end of the Mask Order. An overarching [consensus statement](#) was released on March 24, 2023, that informed each organization's individual policies and procedures related to the continued protection of employees and patients. Participating organizations across the region have continued to review their policies and procedures and adjust if needed, balancing community disease transmission rates and operational needs in order to support staff and patient safety, and patient care, while also adhering to local, state and federal guidance.

These healthcare organizations remain consistent in adhering to priorities that promote patient safety including the following:

1. Patients should mask if they are symptomatic for respiratory illness.
2. There are vulnerable populations at higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 or other respiratory diseases, for whom universal masking in the healthcare setting is needed.
3. Healthcare providers should respect the autonomy of patients. If the patient is masked, healthcare providers should mirror this and be masked.
4. Masking should be supported by any healthcare worker at any time if the provider wants to mask.

Current Action:

The workgroup continues to meet and collaborate as healthcare organizations and systems across the region to develop shared guidance that will further inform future updates to institutional masking policies, such as circumstances warranting universal masking in their healthcare facilities based on the experience gained during the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand that the health impacts of this pandemic continue to develop especially as we move towards the fall where we have historically seen spikes in influenza like illnesses, and future policies will need to take into consideration multiple factors including new metrics for community burden of COVID-19 and other respiratory viral infections, available treatment, and new knowledge about COVID-19 related complications. This work will continue over the summer in preparation for respiratory season.

¹ 1 Includes adult and pediatric hospital, outpatient, and public health infectious disease, infection prevention, and other clinical healthcare and public health leaders in western Washington.