

Title: MASK POLICY FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Policy <input type="checkbox"/> Policy & procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Procedure only	Number: II-21
Category: Infection Prevention and Control Policy	Original Date: July 2020	
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Issued by: Infection Prevention and Control Committee	Approved by: Medical Advisory Committee	
Applies to: Patients, Visitors, All members of the Public		
Related policies: Mask Policy for SAH Workers – HR-CS-35		
A printed copy of this document may not reflect the current version; always check against the electronic version prior to use.		

This policy is a live document and is subject to change as required.

PURPOSE

The safety and well-being of our patients, visitors and workers at Sault Area Hospital (SAH) is paramount. By wearing a mask, we can work together to prevent unknown transmission of acute respiratory illnesses.

POLICY

This policy applies to members of the public and outlines the masking requirements while visiting Sault Area Hospital (SAH). Masking requirements for Sault Area Hospital workers are covered under the Mask Policy for SAH Workers (HR-CS-35).

DEFINITIONS

Mask: A barrier to prevent droplets from an infected source from contaminating the skin and mucous membranes of the nose and mouth of the wearer, or to trap droplets expelled by the wearer, depending on the intended use. The mask should be durable enough so that it will function effectively for the duration wear. The term “mask” in this document refers to surgical or procedure masks, not to respirators. The terms “mask” and “masking” in this document refer to hospital-supplied masks.

Patient Care: Any in-person interaction with a patient for the purposes of providing or assisting in the provision of health care.

Patient Care Unit: Any department/unit/area of the main SAH hospital site, Transition House, or Northway Wellness Centre where patient care is provided. Includes all inpatient and outpatient departments.

Off-Site Facilities: Any off-site department, facility, or clinic where patient care is provided (e.g., PACT, RAAM, SACC, off-site Geriatric Clinic), excluding Northway Wellness Centre and Transition House (see “Patient Care Unit”).

Public Areas: Indoor areas of off-site facilities designated for public access, including, but not limited to, areas such as waiting rooms, lobbies, or interview rooms.

PROCEDURE

At the discretion of the IPAC Medical Director, the Chief of Staff, and the Chief Nursing Officer, in response to current transmission risks, patients and visitors will be required to wear a mask in designated areas within Sault Area Hospital (SAH) or SAH off-site facilities. All members of the public (patients and visitors) will be provided with a hospital approved surgical/procedural mask to wear. Up to date and specific guidance will be provided on Sault Area Hospital website.

Masks will be available near all exterior entrances and nursing stations.

The mask must cover the nose, mouth and chin.

See “Exemptions” below for visitors who are exempt from wearing a mask.

Patients are NOT required to wear a mask in the following circumstances:

1. Patient has a valid mask exemption; AND/OR
2. Admitted patients while in their assigned room; however, they must don a hospital-provided mask when leaving their assigned room for any reason; AND/OR
3. Temporary removal of the mask or face covering is permitted where necessary for the following purposes:
 - a. Actively engaging in an athletic or fitness activity including water-based activities; OR
 - b. Consuming food or drink; OR
 - c. For any emergency or medical purpose.

EXEMPTIONS

The following persons are exempted from the requirement to wear a mask or face covering, and will not be required to provide proof of such exemption:

1. Children under two years of age, or children under the age of five years either chronologically or developmentally who refuse to wear a mask or face covering and cannot be persuaded to do so by their caregiver; OR

2. Patients with medical conditions who cannot safely wear a mask or face covering (e.g., due to breathing difficulties, cognitive difficulties, hearing, or communication difficulties); OR
3. Patients who cannot wear or remove a mask or face covering without assistance, including people who are accommodated under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) or are protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code, R.S.O. 1990, c.H. 19 as amended.

Visitors who are exempt from wearing a mask will not be permitted for in-person visits when designated masking is required. SAH will accommodate virtual visits in these circumstances. These visitors are asked to contact the appropriate department/area to arrange these virtual visits.

ENFORCEMENT AND EDUCATION

This policy will be implemented and enforced in “good faith” to primarily educate people on masks and face coverings and promote their use in public areas and on patient care units.

- a) Persons with exemptions listed above are not required to show proof of exemption.
- b) Signs about the requirement to wear masks or face coverings shall be posted at all public entrances.
- c) Persons at SAH without a mask or face covering will be given a verbal reminder of the policy’s masking requirement.
- d) Employees will be trained on the policy, including where and how to properly wear a mask or face covering, and how to help and respond to individuals who do not have a mask or face covering.
- e) A copy of this policy will be made available on request to a public health inspector or other person authorized to enforce the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMCPA).

WHAT IF A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC ACTIVELY REFUSES TO WEAR A MASK OR FACE COVERING?

If the individual is a member of a group who should be exempt or accommodated and is attending SAH as a patient, SAH has a duty to accommodate.

Visitors who are exempt from wearing a mask will not be permitted for in-person visits when designated masking is required. SAH will accommodate virtual visits in these circumstances. These visitors are asked to contact the appropriate department/area to arrange these virtual visits.

As with employees, leadership will need to support the public to ensure they understand the expectations for individuals entering and remaining on-site at SAH. This is an opportunity to

provide education and promote the use of masks at SAH. Leaders should approach the individual in a supportive manner to ensure they are aware and understand the guidance, and have access to a mask or face covering.

REFERENCES

Public Health Ontario (April 2023). *Interim infection prevention and control measures based on respiratory virus transmission risk in health care settings*. https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/I/2023/ipac-measures-transmission-risks-technical-brief.pdf?rev=2e0e57d58e474ca2966deb5ae783d95c&sc_lang=en

REVISION HISTORY

July 2020, November 2020, May 2023, September 2023, October 2023, November 2023, March 2024, April 2025