

USE OF FACE MASKS – 5 August 2020

Updated PPE Guidance for Staff Visitors and Patients

What is the change?

The use of surgical masks is essential for all Eastern Health employees. The use of surgical masks is mandatory for all ambulatory patients ≥ 18 yrs of age and visitors to our sites.

The use of masks is mandatory for adult inpatients when outside their room and recommended when not outside their room if clinically appropriate.

In addition to our approach to masks, there have been some important changes to our approach to N95 masks and eye protection in some areas.

Why has this change been implemented?

These are proactive steps for the additional protection and wellbeing of staff and our community in response to increasing community prevalence of COVID-19 and DHHS guidance.

Important notes:

Masks and eye protection are one part of our infection prevention and control measures. Reducing hospital traffic, hand hygiene, physical distancing and risk-assessing the situation before any patient contact remain our primary defence in preventing the transmission of COVID-19.

FAQs

Q. I work in an office/ laboratory. Do I have to wear a mask?

A. Yes

Q. Can I wear a cloth mask at work?

A. No, personal masks that do not meet the DHHS guidelines (e.g. cloth mask) cannot be worn at work. Level 2 surgical masks are being handed out as you enter screening points across Eastern Health sites and we strongly recommend you to wear them. Also remember to change your mask every 4 hours, at meal breaks or when it becomes damp or soiled.

Q. When I leave work, can I collect an Eastern Health provided mask for use the following day?

A. No, level 2 surgical mask needs to be collected each day when entering Eastern Health premises.

Q. Can I re-use my mask?

A. No. Once removed, masks should be disposed appropriately.

Q. How long can a surgical mask be worn?

A. Surgical masks should not be worn for longer than 4 hrs without being discarded. They should also be discarded if they become soiled, damp or otherwise contaminated or when you go on a scheduled break.

Q. Does wearing a mask mean I do not have to maintain physical distancing?

A. No. Maintenance of physical distancing and hand hygiene at work remains critically important.

Q. Do I need to wear a mask while in the closed office by myself?

A. If you are by yourself, you may remove your mask. However, if you were to leave your office or someone was to come in to your office, you must perform the appropriate hand hygiene, wipe down relevant surfaces and apply a new mask. Having appropriate hand hygiene and an additional supply of masks in each office is not always practical, so if this is the case keep your mask on at all times.

Q. What am I expected to do when eating or drinking?

A. We recommend appropriate physical distancing when eating or drinking and disposal of your face mask. Once you have finished eating or drinking perform the appropriate hand hygiene and apply a new mask. In areas such as tea rooms are other areas where people congregate; physical distancing must be observed.

Q. Who decides if a patient should wear a mask?

A. This is a joint decision to be made by the patient and treating team. Consideration must be made of the potential impact on nearby patients, staff, visitors and the patient's clinical condition.

Q. Do outpatients have to wear a mask?

A. Yes – Outpatients must follow the same guidance as visitors.

Q. Are patients in ambulatory settings required to wear a mask?

A. Yes

Q. What PPE should visitors and non-staff wear at Eastern Health sites?

A. Any allowed visitors will have the same PPE rules apply to them as staff. The PPE required will depend on which area they are visiting, but at a minimum will include a face mask.

Recommendation of PPE advice can be found in Policy 244 section 4.3.2 and Visitor Restriction

Information can be found as an attachment 7 from the same policy. If they refuse they must be asked to leave. Staff may call for additional assistance (e.g. security) when required.

Q. Who is responsible for ensuring staff, visitors and patients are following these new rules?

A. This is everyone's responsibility however if any refusal or aggression is encountered, please do not place yourself or others at risk and seek further assistance.

Q. Do children have to wear masks?

A. Visitors under 16 years old are no longer able to visit. Masks are not recommended for paediatric and adolescent patients under 18 years old but may be worn as per the family's wishes. Masks **should not** be applied to any patient under 2 years old due to choking and strangulation risks.

Q. I have heard that PPE recommendations at EH are different to other health services, why is this?

A. Eastern Health follows the DHHS recommendations regarding use of PPE as a basic minimum. Other health services face different challenges and have variations to these recommendations as a result. Our approach and recommendations are reviewed regularly and updated accordingly. If you have any concerns about your safety or access to PPE, we encourage you to discuss further with your line manager.

Q. What type of hand sanitiser should I be using?

A. DHHS recommends to use a hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol. Please check the sanitiser available in clinical areas to ensure the sanitiser provided meets this standard, and if not alert your manager to organise for replacement hand rub.

Q. When do I need to wear an N95 mask?

A. N95 masks should be worn when caring for or interacting with any suspected or confirmed COVID patients. This includes when working in COVID areas such as the respiratory assessment clinics, COVID zones in ED, whole wards (or parts of wards) where suspected and confirmed COVID patients are present, and single rooms with suspected or confirmed COVID patients. It is especially important that aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) on patients with suspected or confirmed COVID are done with staff wearing N95 masks. There is an iLearn package and information available on the staff hub for fit checking an N95 mask. Training sessions are available.

Q. When should I wear a face shield/protective eyewear?

A. All healthcare workers who interact with patients and/or visitors in the hospital need to wear eye protection. Face Shields or protective eyewear such as goggles are acceptable – face shields may be preferred where splash or spray of droplets is anticipated. Prescription glasses on their own do not provide enough protection, so a face shield or protective eyewear will also need to be worn. Visitors are required to wear a face mask throughout their visit. Protective eyewear is not required, however if they are unable to wear a face mask, a face shield can be provided as an alternative.

Q. Where will I find a face shield if I need to wear one?

A. Face shields or protective eyewear will be available in all clinical areas where they are required. Please seek out your line manager for more information.

Q. How often do I need to change face shields and goggles?

A. We have multiple options for eye and face protection available. Either goggles or a face shield are appropriate, noting that a face shield may be preferred when a spray or splatter of droplets or fluid may occur. Prescription eyewear on its own is not adequate, and a face shield or set of goggles must be worn over this.

Please note that the face shields that are widely available (with the blue strip and the white foam headrest) are not considered reprocessable for repeated use. Some parts of the organisation have different types of face shields that may be cleaned and re-used (for example anaesthetics in theatre) where separate instructions are issued.

Please note hand hygiene requirements before and after donning and doffing eye/face protection.

More details for General areas (Not COVID rooms or zones):

Goggles:

Staff members should keep one set of goggles that they wear through the day. When goggles are removed (for example breaks or at the end of shift), goggles should be wiped down with a Tuffie wipe and stored in a clean place or container for use later.

Face shields:

Staff members should use one face shield that they wear through the day. If it is removed (for example breaks), it should be wiped down with a Tuffie wipe. At the end of the shift/day it should be discarded and a new face shield used next shift/day.

More details for SCOVID/COVID environments:

COVID areas have strict donning and doffing requirements that need to be adhered to (see CPG 244).

Goggles:

Goggles should be dedicated for use in a SCOVID/COVID environment and available at the donning/doffing station. Staff entering the COVID zone should don goggles and they should be doffed and cleaned with a Tuffie wipe on exiting the COVID area. They should be left for re-use in that COVID area once cleaned. If they are visibly contaminated, they should be discarded in the clinical waste.

Face shields:

Face shields worn in SCOVID/COVID zones and environments are considered single use and should be discarded after doffing.

Links to further Information

Access to other resources can be found on [Objectify](#), [Staff Hub](#) or on the DHHS website at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-covid-19>

Publication date: 5 August 2020, 6pm.

