

## Universal PPE Policy and FAQs

(as of March 9, 2021)

Guidance was issued on [March 8, 2021](#), by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that allows for some relaxation of COVID-19 prevention measures for fully vaccinated people. As a result of these updated guidelines, Nebraska Medicine is making modifications to the Universal PPE Policy.

For the purposes of this document, people are considered fully vaccinated for COVID-19:

- Two weeks after they have received the second dose in a two-dose series (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna), or
- Two weeks after they have received a single-dose vaccine (Johnson and Johnson [J&J]/Janssen)

Guidance will be updated and/or expanded based on the level of community spread of COVID-19, the proportion of the population that is fully vaccinated, the rapidly evolving science on COVID-19 vaccines, the understanding of COVID-19 variants and employee health data related to COVID-19 exposure.

### Key Points Applicable for ALL Nebraska Medicine Sites:

- Regardless of vaccination status:
  - Masks will be required in all clinical settings.
  - Masks will be required whenever a colleague is in the presence of a patient and/or visitor.
  - Masks will be required by employees, patients and visitors in any public setting on a Nebraska Medicine campus.
    - This includes hallways, cafeterias, elevators, parking lots, waiting rooms and all clinical areas.
    - The exception to this would include those health care professionals wearing N95 respirators or powered air purifying respirators (PAPR) while providing care for presumed or known COVID-19 positive patients, those patients that are intubated and pediatric patients under two years of age.
  - Vented masks, neck gaiters and bandana style face coverings CANNOT be worn in the healthcare setting.
  - Eye protection will continue to be required in all clinical settings.
  - Employees are to self-monitor for symptoms concerning COVID-19 infection at the beginning of every shift.

- If colleagues feel they are displaying symptoms related to the virus, they must notify their manager and contact Employee Health.
  - Detailed Guidelines for Healthcare Workers can be found [here](#).
- Fully vaccinated colleagues:
  - May choose to remove masks in private settings away from clinical areas where no more than four other colleagues are present.
    - Private settings include office spaces, break rooms, conference rooms and cubicles
  - Gatherings where masks are removed must remain small (no more than five people)
- Colleagues that are not fully vaccinated:
  - Must continue to comply with current masking and physical distancing recommendations.
  - Should not have unmasked interactions with other personnel.
- All individuals who wish to wear a mask may continue to do so, even if fully vaccinated.

### **Rationale to Universal PPE Policy**

Knowledge regarding COVID-19 is rapidly expanding and allows for the opportunity to update PPE policies to incorporate the best evidence about issues like mask and respirator reuse and viral transmission. Transmission of COVID-19 is primarily via droplets which come in contact with mucus membranes. Masks are recommended to protect the airway. Eye protection is recommended as infectious droplets could come in contact with the eye and spread through the tear duct into the respiratory tract. Use of eye protection and masks prevents this transmission from occurring. Due to continually evolving evidence, we expect these policies will be further refined and revised.

Currently, authorized vaccines in the United States are highly effective at protecting vaccinated people against symptomatic and severe COVID-19. Additionally, a [growing body of evidence](#) suggests that fully vaccinated people are less likely to have asymptomatic infection and potentially less likely to transmit COVID-19 to others. How long vaccine protection lasts and how much vaccines protect against emerging variants are still under investigation. Until more is known and vaccination coverage increases, some prevention measures will continue to be necessary for all people, regardless of vaccination status.

According to CDC Guidance, people who are fully vaccinated can now safely gather indoors, in non-healthcare settings, with other fully vaccinated people without wearing masks or distancing. **However, vaccinated people should continue to mask when they're in public (including on any Nebraska Medicine site)**, avoid crowds and take other precautions when gathering with unvaccinated people who are at high risk of serious illness from COVID-19.

To this end, employees, visitors, and patients will be required to wear a mask while in any public setting on a Nebraska Medicine site regardless of vaccination status. This includes hallways, cafeterias, elevators, all clinical areas and in the presence of patients and/or visitors. For employees, this includes wearing a mask from your vehicle during transition to your location on campus and back to your vehicle at the end of the shift. The exception to this would include those health care professionals wearing N95 respirators or PAPR while providing care for presumed or known COVID-19 positive patients, those patients that are intubated and pediatric patients under the age of two years.

In addition to mask use, existing policy [EC68](#), outlines that eye protection **must** be worn during all tasks where there is a potential of splash of blood and/or body fluids. Expanding on this, eye protection (i.e. goggles, face shield, safety glasses) will be worn by all personnel when directly encountering patients. Eye protection is required when entering patient rooms or providing direct care to patients in procedural and diagnostic areas. Eye protection is not required in break rooms, workstations, and common areas. The exception to this would include those health care professionals wearing goggles or face shield while providing care for presumed or known COVID-19 positive patients.

Employees are to self-monitor for symptoms concerning COVID-19 infection at the beginning of every shift. If you feel you are displaying symptoms related to the virus, we ask that you notify your manager and contact Employee Health. Detailed Guidelines for Healthcare Workers can be found [here](#)

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 may include any of the following:

1. Fever ( $\geq 100.0$  F)
2. Cough
3. Shortness of Breath

Additional symptoms that are less common but have been present with COVID-19 include:

4. Sore Throat
5. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea
6. Muscle Aches
7. Unexplained loss of sense of smell and/or taste

Successful reduction of the COVID-19 spread requires support from all colleagues as well as:

- Strict adherence to extended [use/reuse of masks](#)
- Meticulous adherence to hand hygiene
- Proper mask use and hygiene including
- Wearing the mask as directed to cover the mouth and nose and
- Strict avoidance of manipulation/touching the mask or eye protection to reduce the risk of contamination and self-inoculation

## Employees in Inpatient Units, Ambulatory Clinic Spaces, and Procedural Areas

To keep yourself and colleagues safe, personal masks must be worn as you exit your vehicle and remain in place until you reach your destination. Staff may wear a cloth style mask in public settings while on route to pick up a procedural/surgical mask from their clinical location. All employees working in inpatient units, ambulatory clinic spaces, and procedural areas will be required to wear a Nebraska Medicine issued procedural/surgical face masks, at all times when in a public space, clinical area and in the presence of patients/visitors. Fully vaccinated colleagues may choose to remove their mask when in a private setting such as a breakroom, office space, conference room or cubicle as long as there is no more than five people in the space. Gatherings should be kept small and under five colleagues.

A procedural/surgical face mask will be issued at the start of each shift. Your mask will be used throughout the shift. In the event that the mask becomes visibly soiled, saturated or damaged, a new mask must be obtained. Stock will be securely stored in each clinical setting. Should you need a replacement mask, you must request one from supervisory personnel in the area you are working. Vented masks, neck gaiters and bandana style face coverings CANNOT be worn in the healthcare setting.

All personnel are asked to make every effort to help preserve the supply of PPE and reduce the need for replacement masks whenever possible. Infection Prevention guidelines should be followed on the use and [re-use of procedure/surgical masks](#). Non-soiled face masks may be re-used upon return to work, if appropriate reuse and storage guidelines are observed.

**At the end of shift**, personnel are asked to maintain their use of a mask until they get to their vehicle. Events have occurred where unmasked colleagues have been in elevators, walkways, and entrances in parking and transit structures with other unmasked colleagues without proper distancing, resulting in the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Eye protection (goggles, face shield, safety glasses) will be worn by all personnel when directly encountering patients. Eye protection is required when entering patient rooms or providing direct care to patients in procedural and diagnostic areas. Nebraska Medicine will issue one set of eye protection. For personnel requiring prescription eyewear, standard eyeglasses are an inadequate barrier, and a face shield or goggles covering the eyewear is required.

Safety glasses are eyewear which resemble glasses but have permanently attached side shields and conform to ANSI Standard Z87.1. Staff are welcome to purchase and wear their own eye protection, but it must conform to ANSI Standard Z87.1. There are clip on side shields that conform to these standards that can be worn with prescription eye wear.

## Employees in Non-Clinical Settings and Office Spaces

Personal masks must be worn as you exit your vehicle and remain in place until you reach your destination. Individuals working in non-clinical settings are asked to wear either a procedural/surgical mask, a Nebraska Medicine steri-drape face mask, or a homemade cloth mask while on a Nebraska Medicine campus at all times when in a public space, clinical area

and in the presence of patients/visitors. Vented masks, neck gaiters and bandana style face coverings are not allowed. Fully vaccinated colleagues may choose to remove their mask when in a private setting such as a breakroom, office space, conference room or cubicle as long as there is no more than five people in the space. Gatherings should be kept small and under five colleagues.

Procedural/surgical masks will be available at multiple entrances across campus. Steri-drape masks are available at the NMC HR Service Center or the BMC Administration Offices. Cloth masks can be purchased through [The Company Store](#). Your mask will be used throughout the shift in public locations. In the event that the mask becomes visibly soiled, saturated or damaged, a new mask must be obtained. Personnel is asked to make every effort to help preserve the supply of PPE and reduce the need for replacement masks whenever possible.

Steri-drape cloth masks should be taken home for laundering. Non-soiled face masks may be re-used upon return to work, if appropriate reuse and storage guidelines are observed. Homemade cloth masks should be cared for similarly to steri-drape masks. Cloth masks should be washed each day after use. It is important that a fabric mask is completely dry before wearing it as its ability to capture particles is diminished when wet.

## **Patients and Visitors**

Nebraska Medicine will require patients and any visitors to wear a mask while on a Nebraska Medicine campus. Patients and visitors may wear a mask from home (vented masks, neck gaiters, and bandanas are not allowed). Patients needing a mask, upon arrival, may obtain a mask at various entrances across campus. Visitors refusing to wear an approved mask for any reason will not be allowed entrance. Patients coming for an ambulatory appointment who refuse to wear a mask will only be allowed entrance if they have written documentation of a medical condition that limits their ability to wear a mask from their physician.

Patients with a fever or cough will be provided with a surgical/procedural mask and should wear it for their entire visit on campus and should not remove it until they have reached their vehicle. If they arrive wearing a cloth mask, they will be instructed to remove their cloth mask and wear a surgical/procedure mask.

Non-symptomatic patients and visitors may be provided with a NM steri-drape cloth mask or procedure mask and should wear it for their entire visit to campus and upon transit to their vehicle. Visitors and non-symptomatic patients who wear their own cloth mask to campus are asked to keep it in place until they leave and reach their vehicle.

Inpatients will be provided a procedural/surgical or NM steri-drape style cloth mask upon admission to an inpatient unit. Steri-drape masks will be laundered regularly and when visibly soiled or saturated. Patients will be allowed to wear a mask, from home, so long as it is not visibly soiled, saturated or torn. Any personal mask, that is visibly soiled, saturated or torn, will be replaced with a Nebraska Medicine-issued mask.

All Intubated patients and patients under two years of age are excluded per this policy. Patients should wear masks, as they are able, and requested to ensure it is in place when others are in the room or when they exit the room. Admitted patients should be encouraged but never forced or coerced to wear a mask. Children over the age of two should wear a mask, if cooperative.

## **Conservation of PPE**

Nebraska Medicine has an adequate, but not inexhaustible, stock of masks for staff and patient utilization. In an effort to maintain the supply, conservation of masks is essential. We have no way to predict how long this pandemic will impact the community. In an effort to ensure masks continue to be available to healthcare workers, we must make all efforts to conserve our supply. In the event the supply of procedure/surgical masks prohibits this strategy, distribution of masks will be prioritized based on the highest risk clinical activities. Supply chain is working diligently to secure additional stocks of masks. See [Extended Use and Reuse of Facemasks](#).

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Can I buy my own eye protection?**

Yes. You are more than welcome to buy eye protection, but it must conform to ANSI Standard Z87.1

### **How do I appropriately doff goggles?**

When doffing goggles follow the same process for doffing and storing masks. Remove goggles from the side. Goggles can be disinfected using a germicidal disinfectant. Adequately clean/disinfect the inside then the outside surfaces. Place on a clean paper towel with your name on them.

### **Can I buy the clips for the side of my prescription glasses?**

Yes if you are not on one of the COVID units. Ensure that the clips conform to ANSI Z87.1 standards.

### **Can I still wear my contact lenses?**

There is no evidence to suggest contact lens wearers are more at risk of acquiring COVID-19 than eyeglass wearers. Contact lens wearers should continue to practice safe contact lens wear and care hygiene habits. Eye protection should be worn as per the above guidelines.

### **If I prefer a face shield, where do I get one?**

Talk to your unit leadership about where these can be obtained. Follow the [extended use/re-use guidelines](#).

### **Do I have to wear eye protection all the time, even at a work station?**

If you are entering a patient room or anticipate coming within close contact of a patient, then you should wear eye protection.

### **Do I wear my eye protection for COVID-19 negative patients?**

You will wear eye protection anytime you enter ANY patient room or are within close contact of ANY patient, regardless of COVID status.

**What if I forget my eye protection?**

See your supervisor.

**Why do we recommend people that are fully vaccinated wear a mask in clinical and public settings?**

In public spaces, fully vaccinated people should continue to follow [guidance](#) to protect themselves and others, including wearing a well-fitted [mask](#), [physical distancing](#) (at least 6 feet), avoiding crowds, avoiding poorly ventilated spaces, covering coughs and sneezes, and [washing hands](#) often. Fully vaccinated people should still watch for [symptoms of COVID-19](#), especially following an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. If symptoms develop, all people – regardless of vaccination status – should isolate and be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, including COVID-19 testing, if indicated.

CDC will continue to evaluate and update public health recommendations for vaccinated people as more information, including on new variants, becomes available. Further information on evidence and considerations related to these recommendations is available in the new [Science Brief](#).

**Why are we recommending a procedure/surgical mask for clinical staff and not an N95 respirator?**

Similar to influenza and other respiratory viruses, COVID-19 appears to be transmitted primarily through large respiratory droplets. Procedure masks help to provide protection against respiratory droplet spread. In addition, although not thought to be the major route of transmission, there are some data to indicate COVID-19 viral shedding in the pre-symptomatic stage. Wearing procedure masks in a more generalized manner may help to prevent spread from persons with pre-symptomatic shedding or persons with very mild disease. Finally, wearing a procedure mask at least partially contains respiratory secretions and may prevent an infected provider from spreading the virus to patients or coworkers. In contrast, N95 respirators provide a higher level of filtration and are important in clinical situations where infectious droplets could become aerosolized. This primarily occurs in specific clinical situations such as when a patient is intubated or undergoes bronchoscopy. N95 respirators are difficult to wear for long periods of time and are impractical for generalized use. Also, the supply of N95 respirators is smaller and our supply would not support universal use. We must reserve N95 use for patients with known or suspected COVID-19 and high risk situations.

**When is it appropriate to wear a cloth or steri-drape style mask vs a procedural or surgical mask?**

Procedural and surgical masks should be worn by all clinical staff, those serving food, and any patient presenting with symptoms consistent with COVID-19. Staff requiring a hospital grade mask may wear a cloth style mask upon entering the building and while on route to pick up a procedural mask from their clinical location.

Alternative cloth masks are acceptable for staff working in office spaces and patients/visitors who do not have respiratory symptoms. Patients with symptoms will be provided a procedural/surgical mask and will not be permitted to wear a cloth mask.

### **What type of cloth mask can someone wear?**

Nebraska Medicine has steri-drape style mask available for employees who are working in non-clinical settings, office areas and during transport from personal vehicles to work areas. Steri-drape masks are available for free and can be obtained at the NMC HR Service Center or the BMC Administration Offices. Cloth masks can be purchased at [The Company Store](#).

Furthermore, CDC has issued [guidelines](#) for sewing a mask individuals can wear as a face covering. Cloth mask should:

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face.
- be secured with ties or ear loops.
- include 2 or more layers of fabric.
- allow for breathing without restriction.
- be made of a fabric or material that can be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.

### **How does someone safely clean a cloth mask?**

A cloth mask can be washed in a washing machine with any detergent. After placing the mask in the washing machine, hands should be washed. Dry masks on high heat.

### **Does the universal PPE policy apply to every member of the workforce working anywhere in the Nebraska Medicine Enterprise?**

The universal PPE policy applies to ALL employees although specific mask types may vary by site of work. Please reference the guidance found earlier in this document.

### **I am involved with research and operate out of the research towers, does the universal PPE policy apply to me?**

Those working solely in research towers should follow guidance on masking as above. As noted, if social distancing is not able to be maintained or common spaces are entered a mask should be worn.

### **Should visitors be wearing face masks?**

Visitors will be limited on campus except for certain circumstances. (See visitor [policy](#) for detail). Visitors who do not have their own mask will be provided a NM steri-drape cloth face mask or procedure mask upon entry. If a visitor develops symptoms while on the premises, that person should be asked to leave.

### **Should all patients be wearing face masks?**

Yes. Patients with symptoms concerning for COVID-19, or other respiratory illness, will be provided a surgical/procedural face mask and isolated per our existing policies. Patients without symptoms concerning for COVID-19 and who do not have their own cloth mask may be provided an alternative mask, such as a NM steri-drape cloth mask or procedure mask. Once roomed, it is recommended that all patients continue to wear their face mask to mitigate exposure risk. Inpatients should wear a mask as they are able but ensure it is in place when



others are in the room or when they exit the room. This is an evolving situation and will be reevaluated as needed.

**In procedural areas, can a single procedural mask be worn continuously, including across different cases?**

Yes, a single mask can be worn across different cases and between cares of different patients. Masks must be changed if they become wet or contaminated during a case. The routine use of face shields will decrease the likelihood of this occurring and is encouraged. For detailed guidance, please review the information available on the web at:

<https://www.nebraskamed.com/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19/guidelines-for-patients-with-covid-in-the-perioperative-environment.pdf>

**I work in a clinical setting. How can I eat when I am supposed to wear a procedural/surgical mask?**

Eating is not permitted in clinical areas. If you are working in a clinical setting, follow the removal and reuse instructions as is outlined in the [Extended Use and Limited Reuse of Disposable Facemasks, Respirators and Protective Eyewear document](#).

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

Drinking is permitted in designated locations in clinical areas. If you need to drink, ensure you are able to be distanced a minimum of six feet from others, perform hand hygiene, remove the mask, drink and then replace your procedure/surgical mask. If you are in a shared airspace with others and are not fully vaccinated, more than six feet may be necessary. Please follow the guidelines on appropriate doffing found at the end of this document.

**Are staff allowed to take off their masks to eat while on hospital or clinic premises?**

Staff can take off their masks to eat and drink when they are on premises and if not fully vaccinated, in a location where they can maintain a minimum distance of six feet between colleagues.

Please follow guidelines on appropriate doffing found at the end of this document.

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

Every effort should be made to preserve supplies of face masks. You may remove your mask and store it for short periods of time as noted at the end of this document and then reuse the mask.

**Can I use my procedure/surgical mask between patients, including those with confirmed COVID-19, suspect COVID-19, other respiratory viruses or patients in whom none of these apply?**

Yes. Your procedure/surgical mask should be used according to the [Extended Use and Reuse guidelines](#), which ensures careful and deliberate handling of the mask to prevent both self-contamination and cross contamination. Under conditions of extended use or reuse, a face shield is preferentially worn over the procedure/surgical mask as the form of eye protection.

However, direct care of patients with known or suspected COVID-19 requires use of N95 respirators or PAPRs.

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

There is generally no reason for employees and their families to wear masks while at home. Vaccination, social distancing and taking precautions like washing your hands, using hand sanitizer, and cleaning high touch surfaces frequently would be appropriate for home.

**Can staff gather in break rooms and other places to eat and relax, and if so, should they leave their procedure/surgical masks on?**

In private areas, vaccinated people can remove masks in groups up to 5. This includes conference rooms, break rooms, offices and cubicles. Non-vaccinated colleagues must still wear masks; vaccinated can choose to wear a mask if they're more comfortable. Compliance is a personal accountability.

**Visual Guidance**

The following images are intended to provide clarification to avoid potential errors in the proper use and re-use of face masks.



Figure 1 – This image shows the correct way to store mask when not in use. Notice the exterior of the mask is facing DOWN.



Figure 2 – This image demonstrates the wrong way to place mask when not in use. Notice the exterior of the mask if facing up.



Figure 3 - This image shows the correct way to store a surgical mask when not in use. Notice the exterior of the mask is facing DOWN and ties are placed carefully away from the inside of the mask

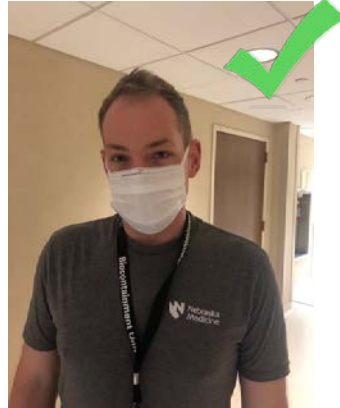


Figure 4 - This image demonstrates the wrong way to store surgical mask when not in use. Notice the exterior of the mask if facing up and ties are touching the interior of the mask. This is not correct

## Visual Guidance Continued



*Figure 5 – This image demonstrates inappropriate wear of the procedure mask. Procedure mask should not be pulled under mouth*



*Figure 9 – This image demonstrates approved wear of face mask. Facemask is shown secured over nose and mouth*



*Figure 6 – This image demonstrates inappropriate wear of the procedure mask. Procedure mask should not be pulled under chin*



*Figure 7 - This image demonstrates inappropriate use of procedure mask. Procedure mask should not be kept on the elbow when not in use*



*Figure 8 - This image demonstrates inappropriate wear of the surgical mask. Surgical mask should not hang from lower ties*