

Guidance for Staff: CDC Guidelines & Universal Masking in Patient Care Areas

Patients and visitors may ask about our masking requirements. Below are some helpful responses to consider if you are asked:

- *“Thank you for asking. At this time, we require masks by everyone because our community transmission level, which is the presence and spread of respiratory illness, is high. The new CDC guidelines require masking for healthcare facilities who are in communities at this level so we require masks until that level drops.”*
- *“We will continue to monitor the levels and adjust our guidelines as things change.”*
- *“We appreciate you wearing a mask to keep everyone safe.”*

Scripting When Addressing a Person Who Complains About Masking

- **Empathize**
 - *“I understand especially when other places no longer require it.”*
 - *“I can share that there are good reasons why we do continue to require masking in our facilities to protect you and our patients.”*
- **Share the “why”**
 - Masking helps protect our vulnerable patients.
 - Health care settings are different than other public places. Other patients, visitors and team members may be at a higher risk of developing serious complications if they contract a respiratory illness.
 - Wearing a mask helps reduce the likelihood that you would become infected with a respiratory illness while you are visiting our locations.
 - Wearing a mask helps reduce the spread of respiratory illnesses, especially if you are asymptomatic, reduces staffing shortages and provides the best care possible. When team members get respiratory illnesses, or other transmissible illnesses, and need to stay home, it can be challenging for hospitals to provide the level of care needed. Wearing masks helps limit these types of staffing shortages and improve our ability to care for patients.

REMINDER ABOUT UNABLE TO MASK PATIENTS AND VISITORS

What is the Difference Between Unable to Mask and Refuses to Mask?

- A patient unable to wear a mask states they cannot wear one due to medical reasons.
- A patient who refuses to wear a mask states they WILL NOT wear a mask and it is for a reason other than a medical one.

What Qualifies a Patient or Visitor to be Unable to Mask?

Masks are universally required. Exceptions will be made when the risk outweighs benefits and patient would experience harm if required to wear a mask. Reasons why a patient may not be able to mask include:

- Health or behavioral health concerns like Sensory disorders, Communication barriers, Autism spectrum disorder, or Anxiety disorders
- Safety: CDC recommends that cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.
- **When a person is unmasked because they refuse to mask**
 - If the person is unable to mask but it is NOT for a medical reason, you can share the following:
 - “I am sorry, but we do require all those coming into our facilities to be masked for infection prevention. I have a mask I am happy to provide.”
 - If it is a patient and they continue to refuse, contact the receiving department to determine next steps to reschedule the patient.
 - If it is a visitor who refuses to mask then we are not able to allow them to visit unless they mask. If there is significant pushback escalate to Security.