

Targeted Masking of Healthcare Personnel

Community transmission of COVID-19 in the United States has been reported in multiple areas, including San Antonio and Bexar County. In the setting of community transmission, all healthcare personnel (HCP) are at some risk of exposure to COVID-19 whether in the workplace or community.

In response, University Health System is implementing **targeted masking** of healthcare personnel providing **direct patient care in specific areas at highest risk of having patients with COVID-19 infection** as an enhanced measure for reducing the likelihood of transmission of COVID-19. Specifically, targeted masking refers to the **practice of wearing barrier (surgical/procedural) masks throughout all patient encounters, unless an N95 respirator is indicated.**

The **following areas** will implement targeted masking for extended use barrier masks:

- **Emergency Department** locations to include medical and trauma resuscitation units, Adult ED, Pediatric ED, and the OB/GYN EC
- **5 Sky Tower** (designated UH floor for cohorting of patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19)
- **ExpressMeds** (RBG & Pavilion)

Targeted masking applies to **staff and providers assigned to these areas** who would experience prolonged exposure. Consultants or other intermittent staff entering and leaving these locations would not require a mask except when **involved in direct patient care of a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 positive patient.**

PPE for consultants or other intermittent staff entering and leaving these locations caring for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 positive patients is based on current Health System guidance.

We also continue to recommend use of a barrier mask for healthcare workers that are determined to have had exposure to a known COVID-19 positive person while at work for 14 days after their exposure, irrespective of their work location.

Extended Use of Barrier Masks

In order to preserve our personal protective equipment (PPE), UHS is moving to the extended use approach for these high risk areas designated for targeted masking.

Extended use of barrier masks is the practice of wearing the same barrier mask for repeated close contact encounters with several different patients, without removing the mask between patient encounters.

Healthcare personnel will be provided with one barrier mask per person per shift.

To preserve the integrity and cleanliness of the barrier mask, emphasis should be placed on the following:

- Leaving mask in place throughout shift except during meals, or when use of an N95 is indicated, during which the mask should be appropriately doffed and placed in a paper bag
- Mask should not hang below mouth and nose as this increases likelihood of self-contamination
- Hand hygiene before and after contact with the mask
- Avoiding contact with the front of the mask when donning and doffing

Barrier masks should be discarded in the following circumstances:

- Barrier mask becomes soiled, contaminated, damaged, integrity is compromised, or becomes hard to breathe through
- At the end of the shift

The **unit PCC** will be the point of contact for mask distribution and replacement for the Emergency Department and 5 Sky. **Nurse Clinic Managers** will manage distribution and replacement for ExpressMed locations.

In partnership with physicians at UT Health San Antonio, we are also continuing to explore additional options for increasing our supply of personal protective equipment, including masks to allow us to expand the use of PPE, while ensuring adequate supply for the duration of the COVID-19 epidemic.

Please note: the COVID19 situation continues to evolve and these recommendations are based on data currently available. Recommendations are subject to change based on future clinical needs and evidence.