

Universal PPE Guidelines and FAQs

(as of August 2, 2021)

Guidance was issued on [July 27, 2021](#), by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that raises concerns of increased COVID-19 transmission due to the Delta variant. As a result, in alignment with the CDC, Nebraska Medicine is making modifications to the Universal PPE Guidelines to support the increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases in the community.

Vaccination remains the most effective way to prevent transmission of disease and is the only way to prevent severe illness with risk of hospitalization and death.

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.

For the purposes of this document, people are considered fully vaccinated after receiving the full series of the following COVID-19 vaccines:

- Pfizer/BioNTech, Astrazeneca-SK Bio, Serum Institute of India, Johnson and Johnson (J&J/Janseen), Moderna, Novavax, Sinovac, and Sinopharm

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 indoors in the presence of a patient and/or visitor.
 - Masks must be doffed and discarded when leaving a droplet/contact precautions isolation room. A new mask must be donned by the colleague immediately after leaving this type of isolation.
 - *When masks are used for droplet precautions, the mask becomes contaminated during patient encounters via large droplet particle transmission. For colleague and patient safety, a new mask is required.*
 - Masks will be required by employees, patients and visitors in indoor **public** settings on a Nebraska Medicine campus.
 - This includes hallways, cafeterias, elevators, parking lots, waiting rooms and all clinical areas.
 - This includes public spaces within badge access areas at East Campus Corporate Pavilion (ECCP)

- E.g. Hallways and break areas within badge access spaces, elevators and stairways
 - 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 follow standard precautions.
 - Eye protection is a continued requirement for care of patients with or under investigation for COVID-19
- 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 who have opted to place the most current COVID-19 badge sticker to the front of their ID badge:
 - 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)
 - Individuals should consider duration of exposure and shared air spaces, as these are additional risk factors for transmission, when considering appropriateness of unmasking.
- Colleagues that are not fully vaccinated OR who have opted to not wear the COVID-19 Vaccine Sticker:
 - Must continue to comply with masking and physical distancing recommendations in all public/private, clinical/non-clinical locations.
 - 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.
- For FAQs on the COVID-19 ID badge sticker process follow this [link](#)

Rationale to Universal PPE Guidelines

Knowledge regarding COVID-19 is rapidly expanding and allows for the opportunity to update PPE guidelines to incorporate the best evidence about issues like mask and respirator use and viral transmission.

Due to increased possible risk of acquisition and transmission of the Delta variant (the predominant strain in Nebraska) even amongst the vaccinated, combined with the updated CDC guidance for mask use amongst the vaccinated in public places, updated recommendations are needed to optimize the protection of our staff and students during this evolving phase of the pandemic. These changes are important particularly to reduce transmission of the Delta variant to those who are unvaccinated, the under vaccinated (such as the immunocompromised or older persons in which vaccine response may be suboptimal) or those who have high-risk family members at home or family members, such as children, who cannot be vaccinated.

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. 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 (≥ 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 upon crossing the threshold into the facility 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 an indoor public space, clinical area and in the presence of patients/visitors. Fully vaccinated colleagues who have elected to wear the COVID-19 ID badge sticker 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).

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.

Colleagues caring for patients in Droplet Precautions must doff and discard the mask once leaving the isolation room and immediately don a new procedural/surgical face masks.

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 exit the building. 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.

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 upon crossing the threshold into the facility 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 who have elected to wear the COVID-19 ID badge sticker 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).

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 at all times while on a Nebraska Medicine campus regardless of vaccination status. 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 these guidelines. 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](#).

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 must 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 guidelines apply to every member of the workforce working anywhere in the Nebraska Medicine Enterprise?

The universal PPE guidelines 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 guidelines 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.

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 who have elected to wear the COVID-19 ID badge sticker can remove masks. This includes conference rooms, break rooms, offices and cubicles. Non-vaccinated colleagues or those that have opted to not wear the COVID-19 ID badge sticker must still wear masks. 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 – These images on the left show the correct way to store mask when not in use. Notice the exterior of the mask is facing DOWN.



Figure 2 – These images on the right demonstrate the wrong way to place mask when not in use. Notice the exterior of the



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

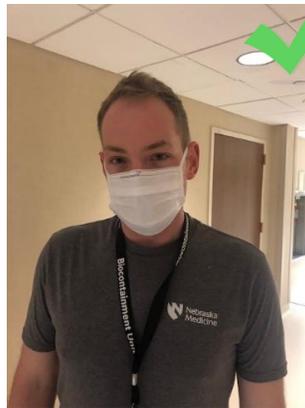


Figure 9 – This image demonstrates approved wear of face mask. Facemask is shown secured over nose and mouth



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