

**Change Back to Situational Masking:**  
**De-Escalation of Mandatory COVID Masking Policy**

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**General Key Messages**

***March 2023***

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- Due to the sustained reduced incidence of COVID-19, influenza and respiratory viral illness hospitalizations and community transmission, WashU and BJC will be transitioning back to situational masking and de-escalating the mandatory masking requirements in health care settings instituted previously due to high rates of COVID-19.
- Masking will become situational (i.e., used for specific conditions/symptoms and for infection prevention) for employees and optional for patients and visitors/families in health care settings effective March 22, 2023.
- Masking will still be required due to:
  - Transmission-based infection prevention precautions per policy (i.e., isolation signs, isolation policy for diseases transmitted by droplet or airborne)
  - Occupational Health (OH) requirements (e.g., providers who are cleared to work but still symptomatic, on return to work after COVID infection, recent household contact with COVID, etc.)
  - Specific stated request by the patient of clinician/employee providing care
- There are no changes to masking and personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements for the care of patients who are positive or suspected to have COVID-19.
  - An N95 respirator or PAPR/CAPR is still required for care of patients who are positive or suspected positive for COVID-19.
- To reduce transmission of infectious diseases in the workplace:
  - Masking will be strongly encouraged and recommended for employees, patients and visitors:
    - Showing signs or symptoms of respiratory illness (e.g., fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat)
    - With a recent known exposure to someone with a respiratory infection
  - Employees are still expected to self-assess for signs or symptoms of illness before reporting to work and to contact OH for evaluation of respiratory illness before coming to work
- All employees are expected to respect the personal choices of staff, patients and visitors who choose to mask. Clinicians and other employees will need to mask when providing care to a patient who requests they mask (e.g., based on the patient's personal preference or individual risk assessment).
- Respiratory hygiene stations will remain at all facilities, and masks will continue to be readily available for those who choose to mask or are asked to mask by a patient.
- Employees are reminded to be accountable for their actions and wear a mask if they have symptoms, and be professionally accountable, courteous and respectful about all individuals' choices about mask wearing and to comply with transmission-based precautions, OH requirements and patient requests.
- WashU and BJC may reinstate universal masking during surges of respiratory viruses (not exclusive to influenza). Infection Prevention/Occupational Health and Infectious Diseases specialists will continue to track COVID-19 case rates in the community and among staff, along with hospitalization rates to evaluate whether and when universal masking would be reinstated.