

Keeping you informed

Respiratory season - Additional Infection Prevention and Control measures effective January 6

What's happening?

- To increase protection from viral respiratory illnesses for residents and health care workers, we are implementing a hierarchy of controls for communicable diseases at the direction of the Ministry of Health.
- The additional measures went into effect on January 6, 2025.
- The use of personal protective equipment (PPE), including medical masks, is one part of the hierarchy of infection prevention and exposure control measures for communicable diseases.
- The masking requirement will be in effect until the risk decreases, which is expected to be in spring 2025. Public health experts will continue to monitor risk levels throughout the respiratory illness season.

How this may affect you?

- **For staff and medical staff**
 - Staff must wear a medical mask in all patients, client and resident care areas. These areas are places where residents and clients are actively receiving care.
- **For visitors:**
 - Visitors are **not required** to wear a mask when they are visiting a single resident in a patient-care area, in multi-bedroom or in communal areas when visiting directly with one individual resident.
 - Visitors **should** wear a medical mask when participating in indoor group events, celebrations, gatherings and activities, except when eating and/or drinking.
 - Visitors **must** wear all required PPE in accordance with local infection prevention control (IPC) policy when additional precautions (i.e., contact, droplet, airborne) have been initiated for a resident.
 - Unless directed by a medical health officer, IPC physician or their designate, viral respiratory illness testing (e.g., COVID-19 rapid antigen testing) is not required for visitation.
 - Visitors who are ill or experiencing symptoms of illness **should** not visit.
- **For residents:**

- Residents must wear a medical mask and other PPE when directed by a health care worker during provision of direct resident care, if medically tolerated.
- Residents and people accompanying them must wear a medical mask over their nose and mouth in all emergency departments and waiting rooms.
- **Exceptions:**

Exceptions to the medical masking requirements must be allowed for:

- people under 5 years old,
- people unable to wear a mask because of a health condition or a physical or mental impairment,
- people unable to put on or remove a mask without help from another person, and
- people communicating with someone with a hearing impairment.

Questions?

- Ministry Contact: Communicable.Disease@gov.bc.ca
- For more information on the use of medical masks in health care settings please refer to the following:
 - [Ministry of Health policy communique](#)
 - [Guidance on the Government of British Columbia website](#)