



## Frequently Asked Questions UCSF Health Masking Guidance Last updated: May 1, 2024

### **What is the new UCSF Health masking guidance?**

Effective May 1 at BCH Oakland and May 6 at UCSF Health West Bay campuses, faculty, staff, and learners will only be required to wear face masks in areas where patient care is delivered:

- during every respiratory viral season, from November 1 to April 30
- during sustained periods of high community levels of respiratory viruses (e.g., COVID-19, RSV, influenza).

Face masks are no longer required outside of these periods. Face masks should be well-fitted and cover the nose and mouth.

UCSF Fresno should follow its current local and institutional policies for masking.

### **What was the prior masking guidance, and why is it changing?**

In accordance with prior orders from the San Francisco, Alameda and Contra Costa County Departments of Public Health, faculty, staff and learners were required to wear face masks in areas where patients could be present. The public health orders expired in all three counties on April 30, 2024, without an extension.

UCSF Health's new guidance will require masking only in areas where patient care is delivered during time periods when there are typically high levels of respiratory viral spread in the community (e.g., from November 1 to April 30) and when there are sustained periods of high community levels of respiratory viruses.

### **How do you define areas where masking will be required?**

These areas are defined as inpatient and outpatient areas where patient care is delivered including where patients are evaluated or treated (e.g., on entering an inpatient room or examination room). The areas can also include screened areas and hallways if patient care is delivered there. It does not include waiting rooms, registration areas, offices, break rooms, hallways, elevators or work rooms.

### **Why did you develop new masking guidance?**

The new masking guidance was created to ensure that we continue to prioritize the safety of patients, visitors, faculty, staff and learners by preventing the spread of all respiratory viral infections, including but not limited to COVID-19.

A cross-functional team met over the past few months to determine a data-driven solution that allows flexibility to institute tighter restrictions, including during high respiratory virus transmission. These recommendations were based on the available scientific literature and our own data.

**How will you determine sustained periods of high community levels of respiratory diseases?**

We will monitor both UCSF and community infection data to determine whether any masking requirement changes are needed.

**Why require masking during respiratory viral season?**

Many viruses circulate during respiratory viral season (usually November 1 to April 30), including RSV, influenza and COVID-19. Given this, our patients, visitors and faculty, staff and learners are at higher risk of becoming infected and potentially infecting others.

Masking, in addition to other measures such as vaccinations, staying home when ill, and timely testing and isolation of symptomatic patients, protects everyone.

**Does the new masking guidance apply to BCH Oakland?**

Yes. Pending final approval through various stakeholders, this will be adopted at BCH Oakland for the 2024-2025 respiratory viral season.

**When masking is required, do I need to wear a mask even if I'm fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and influenza?**

Yes. During periods when masking is required, all faculty, staff and learners – regardless of vaccination status – must wear a face mask in areas where patient care is delivered.

**Can I choose to continue to wear a face mask?**

Yes, you can choose to continue wearing a face mask even when it is not required.

**Are there any exceptions to the masking rule?**

Staff who cannot wear a surgical mask due to a disability or medical condition should contact Disability Management Services (DMS) or Oakland Employee Health.

**What should I do if a patient asks me to wear a mask?**

When patients ask you to wear a face mask during the delivery of patient care as source control (e.g., for patient protection), you must do so unless medically unable or if this would result in other safety concerns that would directly threaten your safety or that of others. Serving patients in this way is consistent with our values and with the Americans with Disabilities Act. You are strongly encouraged to consult a manager if you cannot safely accommodate this request.

**Does the masking guidance apply to workers who are not faculty, staff or learners?**

Yes, the same masking guidance applies to temporary or contract workers, volunteers and vendors who are in areas where patient care is delivered during every respiratory viral season (November 1 to April 30) and during sustained periods of high community levels of respiratory viruses (e.g., COVID-19, RSV, influenza).

**What is the masking guidance for patients and visitors?**

Patients and visitors are strongly recommended to wear a facility-issued face mask during respiratory viral season and identified periods of high community levels of respiratory viruses, when interacting with health care personnel in clinical care locations (including patient rooms or other locations where patient care is delivered). Units must establish procedures for providing patients and visitors with facility-issued face masks. Patients and visitors are welcome to wear a face mask during other times of the year.

Regardless of the time of year, any patient or visitor with signs or symptoms of respiratory infection such as a cough or runny nose should be encouraged to mask. This is consistent with [Standard Precautions/Cough Etiquette and Transmission-Based Precautions](#).

**Will this masking guidance change?**

This is the new UCSF Health masking guidance. However, as new information and data become available and circumstances change, this guidance may be updated further.

**Why is this called masking guidance and not a policy?**

It takes a few months for any new policy to go through the approval process. The interim step is to issue "guidance" which is a protocol that is required to be followed, similar to a policy.