

PPE FAQ FOR NM WORKFORCE

Updated August 8: Several questions were added and updated throughout this document.

Q: Why do PPE guidelines keep changing?

A: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and other agencies have been working hard to incorporate the latest science into their guidance. NM will continue to provide you with the most current national guidance regarding PPE. Our aim is to keep the workforce and our patients safe, and to ensure the supply of PPE for the weeks and months ahead.

Regardless of a patient's infection status, the CDC recommends that all patients be treated with an expanded package of universal precautions that includes both mask and eye protection when there is moderate COVID-19 transmission in the community.

This is due to:

- Increasing prevalence of COVID-19 in the population.
- Evidence of transmission of COVID-19 by asymptomatic people who do not know they are ill.
- Tests that are not always perfect.

This means that when caring for any patient, a face mask should be worn. All staff interacting with a patient who is not able or not required to wear a mask should also wear eye protection. This, along with gloves when blood or body fluid exposure might be expected and other traditional precautions, constitutes "universal precautions." Eye protection includes safety glasses and goggles that provide a seal around the eyes. Goggles that provide a seal are appropriate especially when working with fluids where the risk of splashing might be expected.

- **Eye protection is required in hospital inpatient units, EDs, observation units, operating rooms and procedure areas** for all patient care interactions.
- **Eye protection is required in all other patient care settings** – including physician offices, and outpatient and ambulatory sites – for patient care interactions **when the patient cannot wear a mask correctly and consistently.**

This policy **applies** to physicians and clinical staff, Environmental Services, Food Service, Patient Transport and all other staff interacting with patients. This policy **does not apply** to staff in public areas, waiting rooms and non-clinical facilities.

We expect these guidelines to continue to iterate as the pandemic recedes or vaccination and additional treatment options are available for COVID-19.

Q: Should I wear gloves to protect myself from COVID-19 and advise patients coming to NM to do the same?

A: No. Wearing gloves in public is not a substitute for washing your hands. Instead of wearing gloves, the CDC recommends that individuals practice good hand hygiene with either soap and water or a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Moreover, contamination during glove removal is common. CDC only recommends wearing gloves if you are cleaning and disinfecting your home or if you are a healthcare worker directly treating someone who is a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patient.

Q: Can I take PPE home for personal use?

A: PPE is for use at work and may not leave NM facilities except in support of our universal masking guidelines. All other PPE such as gloves, gowns, goggles, or N95 masks, and all other supplies, are reserved for patient care and should not be removed from any NM facility.

Q: What PPE should I use for suspect/confirmed COVID-19 patients?

A: Please review guidance available on [PPE Guidelines](#).

Q: What PPE is required when entering a room where the patient is mechanically ventilated?

A: Follow protocols below depending on the patient's ILI/CLI, COVID-19 and/or flu status.

For Positive ILI/CLI, COVID-19 and/or flu patients: Staff must wear an N95 or equivalent, eye protection, gown and gloves.

For Negative ILI/CLI, COVID-19 and flu patients: Staff must wear an N95 or equivalent and eye protection. Don gown and gloves if you anticipate the need to perform an AGP such as a filter change, circuit disconnection or resuscitation.

UPDATE Q: What protocols and PPE are required when entering a room where the patient requires continuous AGPs such as nebulizers, BiPAP, CPAP or high-flow oxygen?

A: Please refer to the PPE Guidelines: [What to Use and When to Use It](#).

UPDATE Q: What PPE should I use when transporting a COVID-19 positive patient?

A: Please refer to the PPE Guidelines: [What to Use and When to Use It](#).

Q: What PPE is needed when providing post-mortem care?

A: Follow "Usual COVID-19 PPE guidelines," which include gown, gloves, eye protection and an N95 respirator.

Masks

UPDATE Q: Who should wear a mask?

A: All staff regardless of role and vaccination status must wear a mask when entering any NM clinical building. This includes staff involved in both direct patient care and non-patient-care-related activities. Masks must be worn as follows:

- In all public and shared areas
- In all locations where direct patient care is provided such as patient care units, physician offices and diagnostic centers
- For all staff with pending or approved accommodations

In alignment with the state of Illinois and city of Chicago, beginning Monday, February 28, NN will no longer require fully vaccinated individuals to wear masks in non-direct patient care buildings and administrative spaces where direct patient care is not provided such as:

- 213 Front Street
- Keystone
- Q Center Winfield Town Center
- Snyder Building
- 371 Schmale Support Services Building
- 541 N. Fairbanks
- 211 E. Ontario
- 680 N. Lake Shore Drive in IT and Revenue Cycle Suites
- Conference Centers in hospital buildings, such as the third floor of Feinberg Pavilion, the second floor of Lake Forest Hospital or the Conference Center at Central DuPage Hospital
- All NM parking structures

Removing your mask in the areas specified above should align with both your vaccination status and personal comfort level. Please refer to [Meeting/Classes/Events guidelines](#) for further information.

We are requiring the use of NM-issued medical masks and NM-provided PPE in all settings and circumstances where masks remain a requirement. Members of the workforce who prefer to wear an N95 or KN95 from home in administrative spaces may do so. NM will supply N95s for those whose role require them. Personal masks or cloth face coverings must be appropriate and adhere to NM's dress code and personal conduct policies, and be free of slogans or graphics other than the NM logo. Managers will have discretion to determine if a mask design is appropriate. Please note that bandanas, personal elastomeric masks and masks with an exhalation valve are always prohibited and staff should not double-mask using two NM-issued medical masks. Refer to [Clinical Tips for Universal Masking](#).

UPDATE Q: What type of mask should I wear?

A: Staff should wear an NM-provided earloop or surgical tie mask in accordance with NM requirements. (NOTE: The use of an N95 respirator used for designated patient care tasks will supersede the use of an earloop or surgical tie mask). See [PPE Guidelines](#).

Masks fit each individual differently and the fit of the mask is vital in ensuring maximum effectiveness. Follow these recommendations for a better fit:

- Bend the nose wire to fit close to your face and prevent air from leaking out of the top.
- Tighten the mask by knotting the ear loops and tucking in extra material.
- Use mask-tightening devices such as ear protectors.

For individuals who cannot achieve a close fit with the medical masks, staff should consider using an N95/K95 to achieve a tighter fit.

Personal masks or cloth face coverings must be appropriate and adhere to NM's dress code and personal conduct policies and be free of slogans or graphics other than the NM logo. Managers will have discretion to determine if a mask design is appropriate. Please note that bandanas, personal elastomeric masks and masks with an exhalation valve are always prohibited. Staff should not double mask using two NM-issued medical masks as wearing more than one will not improve fit.

UPDATE Q: Do staff have access to masks with a clear window to help promote effective communication with individuals who lip read such as those who are deaf or hard of hearing?

A: Yes. Masks with a clear window are available to support effective communication with patients who lip read. Additional information on the approved areas for usage, process to obtain the masks and how to don/doff the masks can be found [here](#).

Q: How do I put on and wear the mask?

A: First, perform hand hygiene with alcohol gel or soap and water then apply the mask. Hook the earloops or tie the ties and place the metal wire over your nose and pinch for a good fit. The mask should never be worn below your mouth or chin, around your neck or on your forehead. Prior to removing a mask, perform hand hygiene with alcohol gel or soap. Perform the same hand hygiene prior to placing the mask on your face again. Refer to [Universal Masking: Wearing, Discarding and Storage](#).

Q: How long can I wear the same mask?

A: Staff may continue to wear the same mask throughout their shift unless it becomes soiled, difficult to breathe in, too wet to wear comfortably, torn or otherwise damaged. Refer to the Guidelines for Safe Use, Re-Use and Extended Use of PPE on NMI.

Q: When should I discard the mask?

A: Discard if it is soiled, difficult to breathe in, too wet to wear comfortably, torn or otherwise damaged.

Q: Should I wear a mask in public or when taking public transit?

A: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the state of Illinois, and many counties and cities (including Chicago) recommend or require masks in public, including on public transit.

Q: Should outpatients, clinic patients and visitors wear a mask? Can they wear their own masks from home?

A: The lifting of indoor masking guidelines in Illinois and Chicago on February 28 does not include hospital settings. That means that at NM, masks continue to be required in clinical buildings including patient care units, physician offices and diagnostic centers, and all common spaces such as lobbies, elevators, cafeterias and hallways.

All patients and visitors are to be offered an NM-provided medical mask, which should be worn at all times inside an NM facility as tolerated. If preferred, they may cover their own mask with an NM-provided medical mask. Under no circumstances should a patient or visitor be allowed to wear an exhalation valve mask unless it is covered by an NM-provided mask. No visitor should be given an NM- issued N95 respirator.

Patients should be asked to wear a mask and ideally an NM-provided medical mask. Exceptions are as follows:

- Patient unable to wear a mask or cannot tolerate the mask
- Pediatric patient younger than 2 years of age
- Mask must be removed to provide care

Q: Do pediatric patients, including infants, need to be masked?

A: According to CDC guidelines, children younger than 2 years of age should not wear a cloth face covering due to concerns that they might suffocate. Any child older than 2 years of age should wear a mask, as tolerated.

UPDATE Q: Should inpatients wear a mask?

A: Inpatients are asked to wear a mask when leaving their rooms, as they are able to tolerate it. An inpatient's mask may be placed in a labeled paper bag and stored inside their room when not in use. If a patient is unable or unwilling to wear a mask please consult with the patient's physician or with local medical or operating leadership to see if additional precautions are needed.

If there are two inpatients sharing a room, they do not need to be masked if there is a curtain between them.

Additionally, inpatients may wear their own N95s/KN95s if they prefer as long as it doesn't have an exhalation valve.

Q: Am I able to remove my mask to communicate with a person with a hearing impairment and need to facilitate lip reading?

A: Yes. Staff may remove their face mask only if required for an encounter with an individual with a hearing impairment to facilitate lip reading. Staff must remain behind the Plexi-glass barrier or wear a face shield and maintain a distance of six feet. Please note that NM has masks with a clear window to support effective communication with patients who lip read. Additional information on the approved areas for usage, process to obtain the masks and how to don/doff the masks can be found in these two documents: [Clear Mask Tip Sheet](#) and [Clear Mask – Donning and Doffing](#).

Q: If I am universally masking, what should I do when I enter a room with an airborne isolation sign where an N95 respirator is required?

A: When going into a room where an N95 is required, remove and discard the procedure mask and don N95 respirator prior to entering the room. After exiting the patient room, you may remove the N95 respirator and store it in a separate paper bag for later use. Perform hand hygiene before re-donning a new mask. Please take care when removing and re-using your procedure mask and N95. Please refer to [Guidelines for Safe Use and Re-Use of PPE](#) and [videos on NMI](#).

Q: When caring for COVID-19-positive patients in the same room, do I need to change PPE between patients?

A: When caring for COVID-19-positive patients admitted to the same room, you may continuously wear your N95 respirator and eye protection. Gowns and gloves should be removed, and hand hygiene performed between patients before donning a new gown and gloves.

Q: Can I wear the same mask into multiple exam or patient rooms?

A: Yes, staff may wear one mask continuously. Once in place, you should avoid touching the mask. Perform appropriate hand hygiene if you touch the mask.

Q: When caring for a patient in contact precautions, when do I dispose of my mask?

A: You may continuously wear a procedure mask until soiled, torn or difficult to breathe through. If you use a face shield as eye protection, it may help protect the mask. See [Guidelines for Safe Use and Re-Use of PPE](#).

N95 Respirator

Q: When should I wear an N95 respirator?

A: Staff should wear an N95 respirator if the patient is suspect or confirmed COVID-19 positive, if the patient is on airborne isolation or requires an AGP, regardless of COVID-19 status. See detailed [PPE guidance](#).

Q: Can I use the N95 respirator for multiple patients? When should I discard it?

A: You may continue to wear and re-use your N95 respirator for multiple patients as long as it is not soiled, torn or difficult to breathe through. You can remove the N95 and store it in a paper bag and then don it again. You should discard your N95 respirator at the end of your shift and in the following scenarios:

- When the surface of the N95 becomes contaminated with blood, nasal or respiratory secretions or other bodily fluids. Scenarios where this is likely to occur include CPR, bronchoscopy, intubation, extubation, open suctioning and manual ventilation.
- If it fails the seal test, tears or breaks.
- If it becomes hard to breathe through.

Q: Should I cover the N95 respirator with a surgical mask?

A: A face shield is preferred, as it helps protect the eyes and face from splashes and may reduce contamination of the respirator.

Q: Should I discard my N95 if it is covered with a surgical mask or face shield?

A: You should only discard your N95 in the following circumstances:

- When the surface of the N95 becomes contaminated with blood, nasal or respiratory secretions or other bodily fluids. Scenarios where this is likely to occur include CPR, bronchoscopy, intubation, extubation, open suctioning and manual ventilation.
- If it fails the seal test, tears or breaks.
- If it becomes hard to breathe through.

PAPR

Q: When should I wear a Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR) instead of an N95 respirator? A:

PAPRs are to be used by individuals when they are unable to wear an N95. PAPR use is limited to individuals who:

- Perform aerosolizing procedures such as: bronchoscopy, sputum induction, endotracheal intubation or extubation, open suctioning of airways, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, TEE, labor and delivery or autopsies.
- Cannot properly wear an N95 mask due to facial reconstruction, extreme weight loss/gain, braces or dentures.

Q: Can I wear a PAPR if I have facial hair?

A: Individuals will not be given a PAPR because they have facial hair. The limited number of PAPRS will be prioritized based on an individual meeting the established criteria. Facial hair should be shaved in order to fit an N95. Employees who wish to request a religious exemption from shaving should inform their managers or Human Resources to follow the exemption-request process.

Q: How long can PAPR hoods be used?

A: As a conservation measure, PAPR hoods may be worn continuously by the same healthcare worker for multiple patients up to multiple shifts:

- Staff should write their name on the PAPR hood and store it in the anteroom between uses. Departments should ensure a marker is available to write names.
- Outside of the PAPR hood must be cleaned between every use with a disinfectant wipe (sanicloth, bleach wipe).

Q: What is my region-specific process for checking out a PAPR?

A: For region specific PAPR details, please review policy titled Respiratory Protection Program (NMHC HS 04.0210) and refer to the related document titled “Process for Obtaining a PAPR.”

Q: Are training resources available for a PAPR, if needed?

A: Yes. For a refresher on PAPR use, individuals may self-enroll into the e-learning module titled “Respiratory Protection Program.” When prompted within the module, select “I am a Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR) User” and then select the region in which you work.

Gown

Q: When should I wear a gown?

A: Follow the isolation sign on patient’s door, which outlines contact precautions requiring gown use.

Q: Should I re-use an isolation gown for multiple patients?

A: No, the isolation gown is contaminated due to close interaction with the patient and can be a source of transmission to other. Isolation gowns are single-use and should be discarded after each patient’s care.

Face Shield or Goggles

Q: When should I wear eye protection in hospital, ED, observation unit, operating rooms or procedure areas?

A: Eye protection should be worn for all patient care interactions. This applies to clinical staff, environmental services, food services and patient transport. Inpatients cannot always tolerate a mask and may not wear it correctly at all times. Splash, spray or droplet transmission is not highly likely through the ocular route, but it can occur. Staff do not need to wear eye protection when in public areas or waiting rooms. Eye protection may

be worn continuously as long as it is not soiled, damaged or contaminated. See PPE Re-Use guidelines [here](#). Disinfect face shields and goggles whenever removed, using gloves and approved hospital-grade wipes.

Q: When should I wear eye protection in the clinic or outpatient setting?

A: Eye protection should be worn for all patient care interactions when the patient cannot wear a mask correctly and consistently. Staff do not need to wear eye protection when in public areas or waiting rooms. Eye protection may be worn continuously as long as it is not soiled, damaged or contaminated. See [PPE Re-Use guidelines](#). Disinfect face shields and goggles when removed, using gloves and approved hospital-grade wipes.

Q: Should I wear eye protection in administrative offices, public areas and break rooms?

A: No. Eye protection is only needed when interacting with patients who are not masked.

Q: Can I wear my own eye protection (goggles or face shield)?

A: At this time, we have enough inventory to provide all physicians and staff appropriate eye protection. We are **requiring** the use of NM-issued goggles and face shields for staff who are interacting with patients who are not able to or not required to wear a mask.

Q: Are my ordinary vision glasses considered effective eye protection?

A: No. Ordinary vision glasses do not provide complete protection from splash, spray or droplets, and are not approved eye protection. NM-provided goggles are approved eye protection.

Q: Can I use the same eye protection with multiple patients?

A: Yes, it is safe to reuse eye protection with multiple patients as long as the eye protection is not soiled or damaged. See specific guidelines on safe PPE re-use [here](#).

Q: When should I wear a face shield?

A: A face shield and goggles should be worn if the isolation sign indicates eye and face protection or whenever a body fluid splash is expected. A full face shield provides some protection to the mask from contamination.

Q: How do I safely reuse a face shield or goggles?

A:

- A face shield or goggles may be worn throughout your shift between different patients. Take care not to touch your face shield or goggles. Appropriate hand hygiene must be performed if you do.
- Your face shield or goggles must be cleaned whenever they are removed from your face, are visibly soiled and at the end of your shift.
- To clean your face shield or goggles: While wearing gloves, carefully wipe the inside, followed by the outside of the face shield or goggles using a hospital disinfectant wipe. Allow the item to fully dry, remove gloves and perform hand hygiene. If a film is left on the surface after cleaning, you can rinse the eye protection with a wet paper towel.