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**SUBJECT:** Use of procedure/surgical masks within long-term care facilities  
**Date:** April 3, 2020  
**Pages:** 2  
**To:** Long-Term Care Homes  
**From:** Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health and CEO

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**Background:**

Community spread of COVID-19 is becoming well-established in our area. The social distancing measures introduced by the province are having an impact, however, there continues to be increasing numbers of cases locally. This means that the likelihood of any individual coming in contact with, or being infected with, COVID-19 is increasing.

At the same time, PPE conservation is critical, and a sustainable approach is required. With the projected increase in numbers of COVID-19 residents and the duration of the pandemic response, there is a very real risk to supply lines. If we do not conserve PPE now, we will face shortages when we need it most.

It is very important that long-term care staff not use multiple procedure masks and other PPE items unnecessarily while providing care during the course of their shifts. Non-client facing staff should not be using procedure masks.

A centralized approach to procedure mask distribution will help align procedure mask use with best practices, and will prevent wasting, hoarding or even theft of PPE.

**Guidelines:**

Healthcare workers providing **routine** resident care:

- a) If the home's PPE supply allows, consider providing up to two (2) procedure masks per day for all healthcare workers that interact with residents or are entering resident areas for any reason (e.g. Environmental Services).
- b) When these healthcare workers receive procedure masks, their use should be extended continuously for repeated close contact encounters with several different residents, without removing the procedure mask between resident encounters.
- c) When the healthcare worker is assessing residents on Droplet/Contact Precautions, the staff member shall remove gown, gloves and face-shield on exit and perform hand hygiene. The procedure mask does not need to be changed unless soiled, damaged, or hard to breathe through.
- d) When on a break or eating lunch, the procedure mask can be removed after performing hand hygiene and must be placed on a clean surface away from the resident care area with inner mask facing upward to avoid contamination.

Staff working within an essential role but **without** any contact with residents or resident areas:

- a) All staff who can perform their duties from home must do so to preserve PPE and to practice social distancing.
- b) Individuals whose function must be performed in-person may receive allocation of one (1) procedure mask to be worn in all common spaces and **only** if the home's PPE supply allows.
- c) The mask should be worn when in common areas, and/or when 2 m social distancing is not feasible. When in a private area, the procedure mask can be removed after performing hand hygiene and placed on a clean surface with inner mask facing upward to avoid contamination.

Essential visitors:

- a) Visitor restriction should be in effect to reduce the need for PPE.
- b) Essential Visitors that are permitted entry after screening for symptoms of COVID-19 and ensuring there are none, may receive allocation of one (1) procedure mask and **only** if the home's PPE supply allows.

### **When to Change a Mask:**

At any time, the mask must be discarded if:

- a) It becomes visibly soiled.
- b) It makes contact with the patient.
- c) It becomes very moist such that the integrity becomes compromised.

### **Do NOT Dispose of Masks:**

As recommended by Matthew Anderson, CEO of Ontario Health, it is recommended that all organizations refrain from disposing of N95 masks and surgical masks and use biohazard bags to store the masks for potential reprocessing.

### **References:**

1. Toronto Region COVID-19 LTC/CC Table. Recommended Guidelines Pandemic Universal Masking in LTC/CC. 2020 March 29.
2. Ontario. Ministry of Health. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) use during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Recommendations on the use and conservation of PPE from Ontario Health. 2020 March 25.

### **For more information:**

**Contact:** WDG Public Health Call Centre at 1-800-265-7293 ext. 7011  
After Hours at 1-877-884-8653  
[www.wdgpUBLICHEALTH.ca](http://www.wdgpUBLICHEALTH.ca)