

Yellow alert frequently asked questions

The FAQs provide an explanation of when masks need to be worn by HWs, patients, visitors, carers and other people coming into NSW Health facilities.

Health workers

When should I wear a mask?	Surgical masks and eye protection should be worn when assessing or providing care to any patient with ARI (within 1.5m) and are required in all clinical and patient facing areas.
Why do I need to wear a mask when working in the ED?	Surgical masks and eye protection should be worn when assessing or providing care to any patient with ARI (within 1.5m) and are required in all clinical and patient facing areas.
When in crowded areas of the hospital e.g., eating areas/ cafeteria, do HWs need to wear a surgical mask?	<p>Masks may be considered in publicly accessible spaces.</p> <p>Spaces, where large numbers of people congregate, you may consider wearing a mask e.g., large staff gatherings for educational events (refer to local procedures).</p> <p>Cough etiquette, respiratory hygiene and hand hygiene is always to be practiced.</p>
When should HWs wear a P2/N95 respirator?	<p>P2/N95 respirators including eye protection are worn when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing care for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patient• close contact of a COVID-19 case• care for patients with ARI during AGP/AGBs and communicable diseases spread via the airborne route.
Should HWs be wearing masks in safety huddles, meetings, family conferences etc. on the ward/ other designated area?	<p>Yes, a mask should be worn within all clinical areas (wards/clinics).</p> <p>Cough etiquette, respiratory hygiene and hand hygiene is always to be practiced.</p>
If a HW is in a non-clinical area (non-public area) or office, should they wear a surgical mask?	No, masks do not need to be worn in these settings, however, if areas are crowded you may consider wearing a mask.
During yellow alert, should HWs with conditions that place them in a 'vulnerable' group be redeployed?	<p>Vulnerable HWs should be individually risk assessed to determine their suitability for clinical areas.</p> <p>Wearing a surgical mask when in clinical areas will reduce this risk and should be considered in the risk assessment.</p>
If a HW travels in a shared health vehicle with another HW, do they need to wear a surgical mask?	Masks are unlikely to be required, however, this can be based on HW's discretion.

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Should HWs entering a school for the provision of a service wear a mask? (e.g., immunisation or school within a health facility)

For school-based programs, masks are not routinely recommended. However, a risk assessment must always be performed and there may be situations where a mask is worn.

For schools located within health facilities, HWs can wear a mask and eye protection if they are required to provide direct care for high-risk patient/client (ARI) within 1.5m.

Patients

When should a patient wear a mask? (See questions regarding approved cloth masks below)

All patients to wear a mask on presentation and during transit if able (including waiting areas).

Patients with ARI or risk assessed as vulnerable may be instructed to wear a mask if outside room.

Once a patient is admitted to a clinical area, are they required to wear a surgical mask while they are an inpatient?

Patients will not usually be required to wear a mask once in their room.

If they have ARI symptoms, fever or are suspected or confirmed COVID-19, they are required to wear a surgical mask if they are leaving their room, if able (for example going to the medical imaging department). Remember: some patients will not be able to tolerate wearing a mask.

Why don't children 12 years and under need to wear a mask if they have respiratory symptoms?

In general, it is not practical for children to be fitted with a mask. If a child is wearing a mask, then this can continue while the child is inside a health facility.

Masks can be choking hazards for children under two and are not suitable for this age group.

This advice is consistent with other jurisdictions.

Can a patient with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 wear a P2/N95 respirator?

Patients should not wear a P2/N95 respirator but are to wear a surgical mask when leaving the room if able.

Approved cloth masks

Can a HW wear an approved cloth mask at work?

No, approved cloth masks vary in quality, effectiveness and may not be fluid resistant.

An approved cloth mask can be worn by HWs outside the health facility e.g., travelling to and from work.

If a patient/client with an ARI or COVID-19 symptoms, comes in wearing an approved cloth mask, should it be changed to a surgical mask?

Yes, an approved cloth mask will become damp very quickly when someone has an ARI, fever or COVID-19 symptoms. The mask will be much less effective when damp and may be touched frequently by the patient.

A surgical mask should be placed on the patient and usual admission/discharge processes for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients are to be followed.

Access to tissues, ABHR and a bin are to be provided.

If a visitor comes in wearing an approved cloth mask, should it be changed to a surgical mask?

No, visitors can keep the same mask.

If the visitor has ARI or fever, they should not be allowed entry as per screening criteria.

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Home visits

Do HWs need to wear a surgical mask when they are visiting a patient in their home to provide healthcare?

A surgical mask should be worn when providing direct clinical care.

A surgical mask and eye protection is recommended if the patient has an ARI or is in self-isolation.

Patients are not required to wear a mask if they are not showing ARI symptoms but may choose to wear one.

Carer in a healthcare setting

Should a carer wear a surgical face mask if within 1.5 metres of a patient?

Yes, the carer should wear a mask in clinical areas (ward/clinics).

Visitors

Are visitors required to wear a mask if they come to a health facility?

Yes, they should wear a mask correctly within clinical and patient facing areas while in the health facility.

If they have ARI symptoms, they need to defer their visit.

Posters and information on mask use are available [here](#).

What should be done if a visitor appears to have ARI symptoms?

Offer an alternative such as a virtual visit.

The visitor should be asked to defer their visit if possible.

They should be referred for testing and told to isolate.

Aged care facilities (ACF) / Multi-purpose service (MPS)

Does a resident in an ACF or MPS need to wear a surgical mask?

Not routinely, risk assess as per outbreak management.

Patients with a disability, cognitive impairment, behavioural issues AND/OR mental health conditions

Should a HW/carers/visitor wear a surgical mask if within 1.5 metres of a patient?

A HW/carers/visitor in a disability care facility should take extra precautions including the use of masks.

A surgical mask and eye protection is recommended for patients with an ARI and during clinical care of a patient.

HWs should maintain physical distancing whenever possible.

HWs, visitors and/or carers wearing a respirator, or a surgical mask may cause some patients distress or trigger changes to their behaviour or mental health condition. This will require a risk assessment and ongoing monitoring to determine the best way to manage the risk of transmission of COVID-19 when providing care within 1.5m of the patient.

If a risk assessment determines that a mask will pose a physical risk to the patient, alternatives such as physical distancing and full-face shield should be considered. The risk assessment should determine the appropriate PPE for the HW.

All decisions regarding the risk assessment should be documented in the patients' healthcare record.

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Volunteers in a healthcare setting

Are volunteers required to wear a mask?

Volunteers are required to wear a mask when they are entering into a clinical area (ward/clinics).

If they are in a vulnerable group, they may choose to wear a mask while in all areas of the healthcare setting. Volunteers should not be interacting with patients with an ARI or suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

Contractors

When should a contractor wear a surgical mask?

Masks are required when entering a clinical area (ward/clinics) or publicly accessible area, or they require one for dust/gas/environmental exposures.

Stock delivery to clinical areas – external delivery/courier companies

Do delivery/courier driver need to wear a mask (surgical or cloth) if they are making a delivery to clinical areas?

Yes, masks are required when they are entering into a clinical area (ward/clinics).

Valve masks

If a patient or a visitor is wearing a mask with a valve, do we need to change it to a surgical mask?

Yes, these masks should be changed.

These masks should not be worn as the exhalation valve is generally not filtered and particles are able to be exhaled via the valve.

Reminder: continue to perform hand hygiene, avoid touching masks, encourage cough etiquette and respiratory hygiene.