

Practice Update

November 26, 2020

Audience: ALL BCEHS PARAMEDICS

Subject: COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment Update - Face Shields required for all patient contacts & procedure masks required over EHFR

Information: COVID-19 daily case numbers are significantly increasing across B.C. and we are experiencing many more incidents of potential exposure to paramedics than during the first phase of the pandemic. The SARS CoV2 virus is still not well understood, but experts suggest that there could be relatively large numbers of asymptomatic carriers in our communities. BCEHS is confident that the point of care risk assessment implemented in September remains a valuable tool to enable paramedics to determine when donning enhanced personal protective equipment (PPE) is required. However, to further protect paramedics and patients from potential asymptomatic carriers, effective immediately, BCEHS requires paramedics to wear a face shield in addition to a procedure mask and gloves for **all patient contacts**. In addition, because the exhalation valve on elastomeric half face respirators (EHFR) is not filtered, effective immediately, paramedics are required to wear a procedure mask over the exhalation port in order to protect patients, caregivers and our colleagues.

How does this affect my practice? Paramedics should continue to follow the guidance provided in the September 15, 2020 Practice Update for the COVID-19 Point of Care Risk Assessment (v9.9) with the changes that require wearing a face shield for all patient contacts and using a procedure mask over the EHFR. A new COVID-19 Point of Care Risk Assessment (v10.0) is available in the BCEHS Handbook.

Reminders about masks **N95 Masks**

N95 or equivalent respiratory protection is required in all cases where the point of care risk assessment indicated the patient is at risk for having COVID-19. In addition, an N95 or equivalent respirator is required in all cases where an aerosol generating medical procedure (AGMP) is to be performed. Disposable N95 masks should only be used when the paramedic does not have access to an elastomeric half-face respirator (EHFR).

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Medical Masks including Procedure Masks and Surgical Masks

Procedure masks, also referred to as medical masks in PHSA Policy, typically have ear loops as compared to surgical masks that tie behind the head. Both types of masks protect the wearer from contaminated fluid or debris generated during patient care procedures. Importantly, both types of masks protect patients and staff from the transfer of respiratory secretions, fluids, and other debris. Procedure masks are used for “respiratory etiquette” to prevent clinicians, patients, patient caregivers, from spreading germs by talking, coughing or sneezing. At a minimum, procedure masks are required for all patient contacts. Procedure masks are also required when paramedics are at stations or in vehicles where two-meters of physical distancing is not possible.

Please note: In any scenario where EHFR is worn, a medical mask should be worn over the exhalation valve.

Non-Medical Masks

Non-medical masks are generally manufactured or homemade cloth masks that may reduce transfer of respiratory secretions and fluids. Non-medical masks should not be used by paramedics or BCEHS staff in a clinical area while on duty, when required, at a minimum, procedure masks are to be worn. Please refer to BCEHS Mask Policy for further details.

Who do I contact if I have questions?

Contact your paramedic practice leader at clinicalpractice@bcehs.ca or your paramedic practice educator for more information.