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New Respiratory Protection Guidance

Summary: N95 or appropriate alternative required for direct patient-facing activities for all COVID-19 positive patients or persons under investigation (PUI) status; Level 2 surgical masks required for all non-patient facing individuals.

November 5, 2020

Dear Colleague:

Given the rise in community spread of COVID-19 and increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases in our patient care units, we are exploring all strategies to best protect our staff and providers.

Recent publications in the medical literature have expanded our knowledge about how this virus spreads. Based on this data—and given that we are currently unable to do rapid testing of all admitted patients or ensure consistent, universal patient masking—we are **moving to a higher level of respiratory protection for use when caring for patients with COVID-19 infection or PUIs.**

To enter the room of a patient or treatment area with COVID-19 infection or PUI or to otherwise care for them, one of the following types of respiratory protection will now be required:

- N95 respirator;
- elastomeric respirator;
- envu mask (note: not supplied by the warehouse); or
- CAPR/PAPR.

To ensure that our supplies of personal protective equipment are reliable and consistent in the months ahead, we are introducing the widespread use of elastomeric masks—which are reusable and highly effective—and reintroducing the N95 conservation strategy for N95 respirators (i.e., sequential use of N95 respirator up to 3 shifts) – [see previously released instructions available here](#) .

Fit testing is required for N95 respirators, elastomeric respirators and envu masks to ensure proper protection. Preference for fit testing will be given to elastomeric masks, since they are reusable.

- If you already have an **N95 respirator** for which you have been fit tested, you should start using that N95 respirator. Use of another style/model/brand of N95 respirator will require repeat fit testing, with few exceptions.

- Note: for now, elastomeric respirators and enviro masks **require a surgical mask to be worn over the mask** (see picture below) to cover the exhalation valve.



- Fit testing and distribution of elastomeric respirators will occur over the next several weeks as we operationalize this intervention.
- This change in respiratory protection is **in addition to** the use of universal eye protection for all patient contacts.
- Finally, **Level 2 surgical type masks** are to be used by all non-patient facing staff, staff working behind plexiglass/glass, visitors and patients. An N95 respirator, elastomeric respirator or enviro mask is not needed for greeters/screeners/registrar or anyone else working behind plexiglass/glass.

We realize that the changes to PPE protocols over the course of the pandemic have been stressful. We want to emphasize that **this change is an effort to reduce risk and improve the safety and protection of all staff**. We have gained a tremendous amount of knowledge over the past months, as hundreds of studies have been performed around the world, and we are confident that this increased level of protection—elastomeric/N95/enviro mask plus eye protection—will ensure adequate supplies of PPE through the coming months and assist in keeping staff and providers safe.

Thank you for working with us as we navigate this pandemic together.