



**For Your Information**

March 26, 2020

*This message is for Bozeman Health employees and medical staff from Incident Command.*

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**Bozeman Health Implements Mask Utilization Guidelines in Response to COVID-19**

**Here's what's happening...**

Over the past week some organizations have advocated for universal surgical mask use for healthcare providers. As an example, on March 20, 2020, the American College of Emergency Physicians put forward a position statement on this subject saying that "Healthcare personnel in the emergency department should consider wearing a face mask or surgical mask during their entire shift if they are providing patient care, unless the mask becomes soiled and needs replacement."

Although this guidance may be reasonable in high risk areas where healthcare personnel are in frequent close proximity to a predominantly undifferentiated patient population, there are no recommendations from either CDC or WHO that broadly recommend that healthcare personnel should wear surgical masks outside of the instance of direct patient care being provided to specific at-risk patients. At-risk patients would include suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 or other patients with possible respiratory or infectious illness symptoms.

It is important to know that there are no published studies that show continuous use of surgical masks by healthcare providers or by those not directly involved in patient care will lower the risk of getting COVID-19. By comparison there is **much stronger evidence in support of hand hygiene and social distancing practices.**

**Here's what you need to do...**

It is reasonable for staff and providers at Bozeman Health involved in direct patient care in high-risk areas (such as the Emergency Department, Cancer Center, UrgentCare, Viral Triage Clinic, and hospital/clinic entrance screening locations) **to consider** use of a mask throughout their shift. We also do not want to restrict use for any staff members in other care areas who may feel that regular surgical mask use is appropriate to their clinical location.

**If you believe that continuous use of a mask is right for you when providing care to our patients at Bozeman Health, please do so with these three limits, and keep risks of mask overuse in mind.**

- There are ongoing severe shortages of PPE worldwide so please consider wearing the same mask for an extended period of time to preserve supplies (consistent with Bozeman Health PPE Contingency Protocol). Bozeman Health is committed to preserving our ability to protect our staff for the long term. Universal use of PPE can contribute to depletion of PPE supply and may unintentionally lead to not having appropriate PPE available when needed for treatment of positive COVID-19 patients in the coming weeks.
- Extended or continuous mask use should be based on guidance available in Bozeman Health's PPE conservation guidelines as available on MIND.
  - Consider wearing the same mask for extended time periods to preserve supplies
  - Preference should be given to using reusable washable masks when available

- Perform hand hygiene (wash with soap and water or use hand sanitizer) after touching or adjusting mask
- Discard mask and replace if it becomes wet, soiled, or damaged
- Do not store masks between use in pockets, drawers, etc.
- Continuous mask use can create a false sense of security. Remain vigilant in practicing all proven evidence-based approaches to infection prevention such as hand washing, refraining from touching your face, and rigorously practice social distancing. Frequent adjustments to the mask can easily lead to inadvertent contamination of the mask, face, or hands without strict attention to hand hygiene behaviors.

**Here's why...**

Bozeman Health employee safety, health, and overall well-being is of utmost importance. Living our mission of improving community health and quality of life starts with our employees and their families. This requires us to follow evidence-based practices while managing the local community outbreak of COVID-19 in the setting of a world-wide shortage of all PPE.

**Questions or comments?** Follow your chain of command and send questions to your supervisor/manager who will send questions to the appropriate Incident Command team member.