



POLICY TITLE: Appropriate Use of Face Masks

Responsible Department: Environmental Health & Safety

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SUMMARY & PURPOSE:

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, germs (infectious agents) are a part of everyday life and are found in our air, soil, water, and in and on our bodies. Many germs live in and on our bodies without causing harm and some even help us to stay healthy. Only a small portion of germs are known to cause infection. An infection occurs when germs enter the body, increase in number, and cause a reaction. Infections require three elements:

- **Source:** places where infectious agents (germs) live (e.g., surfaces, human skin)
- **Susceptible Person:** person with a way for infectious agents (germs) to enter the body
- **Transmission:** a way infectious agents (germs) are moved to the susceptible person

Airborne and droplet transmission are two ways of spreading infectious viruses and bacteria through the air. Droplet transmission occurs when droplets are expelled from an infected person onto the mucosal surfaces of a susceptible person. Airborne transmission refers to the travel of small particles in aerosols, allowing them to remain suspended in the air for extended periods.

- **Droplets transmission:** Sprays and splashes occur when an infected person coughs or sneezes, creating droplets which carry germs short distances (within approximately 6 feet). These germs can land on a susceptible person's eyes, nose, or mouth and can cause infection (example: pertussis or meningitis).
- **Airborne transmission:** Inhalation occurs when germs are aerosolized in tiny particles that survive on air currents over great distances and time and reach a susceptible person. Airborne transmission can occur when infected patients cough, talk, or sneeze germs into the air (example: TB or measles).

The CDC recommends two tiers of precautions to prevent the spread (transmission) of infections in the health care setting: Standard Precautions and Transmission-Based Precautions. Risk-based Standard Precautions and

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Transmission-Based Precautions make use of common practices and personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect patients, employees, and visitors from infection, and prevent the spread of infection within the health care setting. This policy addresses the appropriate use of face masks in the health care setting throughout Baptist Health.

This policy is in accordance with Florida Patient Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, section 381.026, F.S. Baptist Health will reassess health and safety recommendations in accordance with national and state guidelines and may implement additional PPE recommendations. This policy, our visitation policy, our Patient Bill of Rights, and the latest facilities-specific visitation information is accessible on our Baptist Health website (<https://baptisthealth.net/>).

POLICY:

To ensure the health and safety of our patients, employees, and visitors, face masks will be required under special circumstances, such as when a patient, visitor, or employee is exhibiting signs or symptoms of or has a diagnosed infectious disease that can be spread through droplet or airborne transmission. This policy applies to all Baptist Health employees, visitors and patients, two years of age and older. This policy does not address the appropriate use of elastomeric air-purifying respirators (APRs) or supplied-air respirators (SARs) worn by employees for protection against gases, vapors, or particles.

1. Definitions

- A. Common area: refers to areas in a health care setting where patients are not treated, diagnosed, or examined.
- B. Employee: refers to any person under employment or contract of a health care setting, including health care practitioners, administrative staff, maintenance staff, aides, contractors, students, and volunteers.
- C. Health care setting: refers to any place where health care practitioners and/or health care providers practice their profession or provide services.
- D. Patient: refers to a person receiving services from a health care practitioner or health care provider.
- E. Sterile areas: refers to locations where surgery is conducted or where procedures that require aseptic techniques are performed.
- F. Sterile procedure: refers to aseptic procedures with the goal of minimizing the risk of microbial contamination to reduce the rate of invasive or surgical site infection.
- G. Visitor: refers to any person in a health care setting who is not an employee or patient of the health care setting.

2. Required use of face masks for patients and visitors. Both patients and visitors may opt out of wearing a face mask if an alternative method of infection control or infectious disease prevention is available. Notwithstanding the opt-out provisions herein, the use of a face mask is required for patients and visitors as described below:

- A. Patients. The use of a face mask is required for patients in common areas of the health care setting if the patient is exhibiting signs or symptoms of or has a diagnosed infectious disease that can be spread through droplet or airborne transmission.
- B. Visitors. Visitors should avoid entering a health care setting if they are sick, unless seeking medical care or otherwise necessary. The use of a face mask is required if the visitor is:
 - I. Exhibiting signs or symptoms of or has a diagnosed infectious disease that can be spread through droplet or airborne transmission
 - II. In sterile areas of the health care setting or an area where sterile procedures are being performed
 - III. In an in-patient or clinical room with a patient who is exhibiting signs or symptoms of or has a diagnosed infectious disease that can be spread through droplet or airborne transmission.
 - IV. Visiting a patient with a diagnosed or confirmed condition affecting the immune system, where the treating practitioner has determined that the use of a face mask is necessary for the patient's safety. The use of a face mask is required even if no signs or symptoms are indicated by the visitor/patient.



- C. Patients/visitors with questions regarding our face mask use expectations can ask a caregiver team member or the Patient Experience department for further guidance. Infection Prevention & Control will assess any opt out requests by a patient/visitor in conjunction with Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S), when necessary, to determine if an alternative method of prevention is appropriate.
3. **Required use of face masks for employees.** Employees who are sick should contact their immediate supervisor and the Occupational Health Office (OHO). Employees may opt out of wearing a face mask if an alternative method of infection control or infectious disease prevention is available.
- A. Notwithstanding the opt-out provisions herein, employees are required to use an FDA-certified medical/surgical mask or, when indicated, a NIOSH-approved respirator if they are:
- I. Conducting sterile procedures
 - II. Working in a sterile area
 - III. Caring for a patient with a diagnosed or confirmed condition affecting the immune system, where the treating practitioner has determined that the use of a face mask is necessary for the patient's safety. The use of a face mask is required even if no signs or symptoms are indicated by the employee/patient.
 - IV. With a patient on droplet or airborne isolation (when inside a room with patient or when within 6 feet of a patient if patient is not inside a room).
 - V. Engaging in non-clinical potentially hazardous activities that require face mask to prevent physical injury or harm in accordance with industry standards.
- B. Employees with questions regarding our face mask use expectations can ask their direct leader and/or the facility's Infection Prevention & Control department. Infection Prevention & Control will assess any opt out requests by an employee in conjunction with the Occupational Health Office (OHO) and the Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) Department, when necessary, to determine if an alternative method of prevention is appropriate.

SUPPORTING/REFERENCE DOCUMENTATION:

- Visitation and Patient's Rights:
 - *No Patient Left Alone Act*, 408.823, F.S.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Core Infection Prevention and Control Practices for Safe Healthcare Delivery in All Setting*: [Infection Control | CDC](#)
- Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA):
 - Visitation Rights (2022) [AHCA: Visitation \(myflorida.com\)](#)
 - Standards for the Appropriate Use of Facial Coverings for Infection Control, [59AER23-1 and 59AER23-2](#)
- Barrier Face Covering and Surgical/Medical Mask Standards:
 - ASTM F2100-23, *Standard Specification for Performance of Materials Used in Medical Face Masks*
 - ASTM F3502-23a, *Standard Specification for Barrier Face Coverings*
- Occupational Health and Safety (applies to Baptist Health employees):
 - Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), 29 CFR 1910.134

RELATED POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND ASSOCIATED FORMS:

- Visitation and Patient's Rights:
 - BH-10000-66490-63, Baptist Health's *In-Person Visitation Rights and Safety Guidelines* policy
 - *Baptist Health's Patient Bill of Rights*: [Patient Bill of Rights | Baptist Health South Florida](#)
- Occupational Health and Safety (applies to Baptist Health employees):
 - BHSF-680.16, Baptist Health's *Respiratory Protection Program and Medical Evaluation for Fit Testing* policy

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ENFORCEMENT & SANCTIONS:

Visitors: In accordance with Florida's *No Patient Left Alone Act*, 408.823, F.S, and our *In-Person Visitation Rights and Safety Guidelines* policy (BH-10000-66490-63), Baptist Health maintains the right to suspend in-person visitations of a specific visitor if the individual interferes with patient care activities, and/or violates this policy during visitations.

Employees: Violations of this policy may lead to revocation of system privileges and/or disciplinary action including termination. Anyone willfully violating this policy will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.