

Masking Options and Adaptations for Healthcare Providers to Address Patient Communication Challenges

Note: If you have any questions or comments contact IPC at ipcsurvstdadmin@ahs.ca.

Patient* includes the patient receiving care, as well as essential family care provider or support person required for the care of the patient.

Best practice recommendations

Medical mask is a broad term used to include surgical (with ties) and procedure (with ear loops) masks. The term surgical/procedure mask is used throughout this document.

For more details about standards, testing and rating levels of AHS medical/surgical/procedure masks, refer to [Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE Frequently Asked Questions\)](#), # 51 and #52 and Continuous Masking FAQ is available on Insite: Home > Tools > COVID-19.

Purpose

- This information sheet provides options for healthcare providers to support communication with patients* when masking interferes with the efficacy of intervention or significantly impairs or interferes with communication when caring for patients* with communication or cognitive challenges where visualization of the healthcare provider's mouth and face is essential to meet care needs.
- The information provided assumes that all other relevant recommendations are being followed, e.g., [routine practices](#), e.g., [infection prevention and control risk assessment](#) (IPC RA), [hand hygiene, cleaning and disinfection](#), and any [additional precautions](#).

Application

The following adaptations may be considered to facilitate communication, if [masking is required](#), especially in settings of serious discussions related to sensitive or complex health matters or where masking interferes with the intervention required.



1. Personal protective equipment adaptations

- 1.1. A transparent face shield which extends past the chin, or a clear mask may be used in place of a surgical (with ties)/procedure mask (with ear loops) to facilitate communication, refer to **Table 1** for details.
 - A transparent face shield without a surgical/procedure mask may be considered when the patient*:
 - does not have respiratory symptoms or on modified respiratory, droplet or contact and droplet precautions; and
 - requires adaptations for communication purposes.
 - [prefers or if staff chooses to continuously mask at work](#). In this case, the patient may also wear a surgical/procedure mask or face shield.
- 1.2. Alternatively, surgical/procedure masks that allow visualization of the mouth, lips and teeth are available from Contracting, Procurement and Supply Management (CPSM). These masks:
 - may be worn in place of a surgical/procedure mask to address patient communication challenges;
 - cost more than a regular surgical/procedure mask; and
 - can be ordered from vendor through a direct purchase order.

For more information contact
ipcsurvstdadmin@ahs.ca
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Table 1: Description of transparent face shields and masks

| Product | Sample image | Description |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Standard face shield |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully inventoried All standard face shields supplied through CPSM inventory and to supply carts are a minimum 7 ½ inches, or 19cm, in length, and can be safely used. The brand of face shield may change based on available stock, but all are approved for use For ordering a standard face shield contact your local site services staff. Ordering numbers will vary by zone/area, e.g., iProcurement Oracle # 373130 |
| Mask procedure with window |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Available from vendor by direct purchase order. Ordering numbers may vary by zone/area. e.g., iProcurement Oracle # 382885, supplier: Investissements Gest-E Inc, manufacturer Topgene & Osmunda Tried by speech language and audiology departments at one site with positive results |

2. Other communication supports

2.1. For suggestions to help people with speech, language and hearing difficulties see the Communication Access [page](#). Strategies may include use of pen and paper, [pocket talkers](#) (amplification device that can be used for people to hear better), [hearing loop systems](#) (provides a wireless signal delivering sound customized to each individual's hearing loss.), and other electronic communication supports such as apps that convert speech to text.

- Handle communication supports with clean hands.
- Clean communication supports such as communication books, hearing devices, Cleaning and disinfecting the iPad Patient-Family Virtual Visitation (see Insite) and electronic devices after use.

Note: The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association offers resources and supports and can be contacted by email at info@chha-ed.com or by phone at 780-428-6622.



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