

This guideline covers use of masks as to prevent transmission of infection from the wearer to those around them, as well as provide protection from others at close range.

- Masks may serve as both:
 - **Universal masking** is wearing a mask at all times while at work to prevent transmission of respiratory secretions from the wearer’s nose and mouth to those around them, *AND*
 - **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** to protect healthcare personnel from exposure to infectious organisms as part of transmission-based precautions and as protection from contamination (e.g., splash and spray during procedures) during patient care.

****Notes****

- *Only BILH-provided surgical masks and respirators are allowed to be worn by staff in facilities that treat patients.*
- *See [BILH Interim PPE Guideline](#) for information about proper PPE use, including surgical masks and respirators.*

Choosing Which “Mask” to Use for Universal Masking

- Remember that the best protection is when **both** persons wear well-fitting masks, such as surgical masks
 - [Strategies to improve the fit of your surgical mask](#) are outlined by the CDC
- **Respirators are not required for universal masking.** Healthcare personnel who have been fit tested may consider wearing a BILH-provided respirator during times of high community incidence of COVID-19 in limited clinical settings where patients may be unable or unwilling to wear a mask or where groups of patients share a crowded space, such as:
 - Patients in behavioral health or other congregate care settings
 - Patients in Emergency Departments
 - Patients who are short of breath and unable to tolerate a mask
- Note that if respirators are used for universal masking in the patient care setting:
 - **The first choice is a reusable respirator** (MSA or 3M elastomeric, or envo[®] mask)
If a disposable respirator must be used, [extended use](#) must be practiced

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Surgical Masks for Universal Masking

- **Masks must be worn continuously for the entire shift in all settings**, except when in well-defined areas restricted from patient access (e.g., break rooms, conference rooms, offices). See [BILH Guidance on Masking, Meeting and Gatherings](#) for details.
- **In a patient care area, masks should not be stored or put down on a surface** and must be discarded when fully removed.
- Masks should be discarded and replaced at any time if moist, torn or visibly soiled.

Reusable Respirators for Universal Masking

- When removing your respirator, please refer to the procedure for disinfection and storage of your respirator in the appropriate protocol:
 - [MSA Elastomeric Respirator Training – One Page Handout](#)
 - [3M Elastomeric Respirator Training – One-Page Handout](#)
 - [ENVO Mask Respirator Training – One-Page Handout](#)
- Note that due to the presence of an exhalation valve:
 - enviro[®] masks must be covered with a surgical mask.
 - 3M elastomeric respirators require either an exhalation valve filter or a covering surgical mask.

N95 Disposable Respirators for Universal Masking

- If a disposable N95 respirator is worn for universal masking, **extended use must be practiced.**
- Disposable N95 respirators should not be reused (i.e., do not store in a bag or container for future use).