

# Coronavirus Update

## Issue 11 — Tuesday, March 24

### Important COVID-19 Message Regarding Isolation Masks

We can never say it enough: Your safety and well-being, and that of our patients is our priority, always.

These are clearly complicated and extraordinary times, requiring us to take extraordinary actions and make critical decisions, sometimes hour-by-hour.

Given the widespread transmission of COVID-19 in our community, and out of an abundance of caution for the nuances of this new virus, we will be providing a facemask for all colleagues – clinical and non-clinical — working in our hospitals, patient care settings, and physician offices, including our home care providers, starting **Tuesday, March 24**.

A new isolation mask will be provided daily, by the charge nurse or department leader, for our colleagues to wear continuously throughout their shift, only to be removed while eating or drinking in designated non-patient care areas. Physicians can obtain a mask from security as well.

This new mask policy is a departure from standard approaches to infection prevention and goes beyond what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is currently recommending. We suspect it will be a welcome approach for all of our colleagues who have certainly wondered about, if not expressed, their concern for their personal safety and well-being given the high-risk nature of health care amidst a pandemic. By providing facemasks to all colleagues, we will be protecting our patients and colleagues should they come in contact with someone infected who is not yet showing symptoms.

If you are wondering, “why now?” we want to be transparent that there is, and continues to be, an international shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks. As concerns continue to be amplified, and measures take effect such as the cancellation of elective procedures and the closure of many businesses, supplies have been freed up allowing health care leaders to reevaluate their prioritization and rationing measures. Additionally, international factories that were shut down during the height of the pandemic in their area are slowly coming back online, creating some breathing room around chronic supply issues for items like facemasks.

Our new mask policy will require you to:

- Adhere to strict guidelines around extended use/reuse of masks
- Practice hand hygiene
- Wear the mask use properly, covering your mouth and nose
- Avoid touching the mask and then your face
- Replace mask is visibly soiled or damaged

Please remember that conservation of our PPE supply is essential, so take and use only one mask per shift – unless the mask becomes visibly soiled or damaged.

We are grateful that we have secured enough isolation masks to expand our mask policy and provide all colleagues with an additional level of safety. We want to thank all our supply chain colleagues working 24/7, scouring the sources to bring you this protection. Give them an elbow bump if you see them!

Please know that we continue to listen to your needs and concerns and we never stop thinking about what matters most to our dedicated colleagues.



If you have traveled to any country outside of the United States, or have questions related to the coronavirus as it pertains to Virtua Health, please call 609-444-2828.

Colleagues are also invited to email their questions to [virtuainfo@virtua.org](mailto:virtuainfo@virtua.org) for potential inclusion in FAQs sections and topics in future issues of *Coronavirus Update*.