

# Your Guide to Talking Updated Masking Policy with Teams and Patients

*As we transition from universal masking to optional masking, we can expect a wide range of emotions from our teams, patients, and their caregivers. Providing clarity in the midst of change is one of the kindest things we can do for each other. Use this guide to help talk about it.*

## Talking with TEAMS



## Talking with PATIENTS

### MAKE TIME TO TALK

**Start with a quick check-in.** Make time during a relevant team meeting to ask:

- What is one reason you're nervous or excited for universal masking to end?
- How will this change impact your day-to-day?
- What response do you anticipate from patients?

**Don't assume that everyone on your team feels the same. Being mindful of this creates a safe space for everyone.**

Remind your team that this isn't an opportunity for political discussion, but to understand concerns, celebrate how far we've come in the pandemic, and learn how to continue to support each other.

### PREPARE TOGETHER

**Plan for the hard stuff.** Anticipating reactions helps teams feel prepared to handle hard conversations.

- In optional areas discuss reasons why some patients may choose to continue to mask.
- In required areas discuss reasons why some patients may be hesitant or frustrated at continued masking.

**Try reframing masking as a new social skill.** Think of masking as another way we can show respect. If working directly with a masked patient, consider asking if they would like you to mask—or just follow their lead and put one on.

**If a patient asks our teams to mask, we should mask.** This is an opportunity to demonstrate compassion and to empower patients as equal members of their care team.

### EXPECT A RANGE OF EMOTIONS

**Be open to feedback a patient wants to share.** Showing curiosity and appreciation for their willingness to open up can create a safe space for the conversation to progress. Preparing your teams to respond with compassion may anchor that sense of safety.

**Align information sharing with U of U Health message:** We encourage those who are high risk to continue masking; we ask anyone who is experiencing cold or flu symptoms to mask; We have adopted masking protocols into our precaution measures; We will continue to monitor trends so that we can nimbly adjust our policy, as appropriate.

### FOR PATIENTS WHO REFUSE TO MASK

**Start with the "why."** Explain that patients in your area are more likely to get seriously sick or even die from common illnesses. Help them understand that masking can protect those patients from many illnesses, not just COVID.

**Keep doing your part.** If the patient argues about the efficacy of masks, try not to engage in a debate, but cite the policy and explain that this is how Utah Health is trying to do our part to protect our most vulnerable patients.

**If a patient still refuses to mask, try mitigating measures:**

- **Distance.** Guide the patient to wait in an area near their appointment but away from others (if possible).
- **Room them, or the vulnerable patient,** depending on the flow of the area.
- **Plan for future appointments.** Schedule them outside of peak hours with high volumes of patients.
- **Offer a virtual appointment.**
- **Provide Office of Equal Opportunity contact info** to consider an official accommodation for future visits.