Infection, Prevention and Control – Mask Wearing

Date completed by clinical team on 04/07/2022

Purpose: This Standard Operating Procedure provides infection prevention and control guidance with safety in relation to mask wearing for primary care settings

Procedure: The aim of the procedure is to maximise infection prevention and control and keep patients and staff safe in primary care.

When patients are unable to tolerate or unwilling to wear a mask in the surgery staff should positively engage with patients and accompanying persons with the aim of bringing people together with the common purpose of infection prevention and control. Dialogue should aim to minimise conflict.

If mask wearing is not possible, undertake a rapid risk assessment in line with infection prevention and control guidance and policy. Consider any increased public health risk for the patient, other patients, staff, and visitors. Consider circumstances in which wearing a mask would jeopardise care (e.g., for patients receiving oxygen therapy) or where people are unable to wear a mask due to physical or mental health conditions or a disability.

Staff should explain the reasons for the infection prevention and control guidance and the importance of mitigating the risk of onward transmission to keep everyone safe. The autonomy and rights of individual patients need to be balanced against the potential harm to others in the practice.

Clinical members managing a patient who is unable to tolerate or unwilling to wear a mask or where a clinician is concerned about attending to a patient who is not wearing a mask the above advice should first be followed, including a risk assessment in line with infection prevention and control guidance. Mitigating actions to ensure the clinical encounter does not expose the clinician to risk and possible harm should be used. In some cases, this may mean ensuring the clinician wears enhanced personal protective equipment, as well as other adjustments to where and how the patient is managed.

When a clinical member is required to visit a patient’s home they can request that a mask be worn for the duration of care, this should be approached with due sensitivity. If a patient and or their companions are unable or unwilling to wear a mask, assess risk and identify mitigations as above.

In the event of a patient who refuses to wear a mask, the practice must consider its duty of care to protect staff under health and safety legislation and not to expose them to infection. Individual clinicians may, after an assessment in line with infection prevention and control guidance, choose to see patients who refuse to wear a mask, but employees cannot be compelled by the practice to do so.

To be reviewed Oct 2022