

Guidelines for Situations Where Patients or Visitors Refuse to Mask

Updated 7/27

These guidelines should be used in situations where a patient or support person seeking entry to our facility refuses to wear a mask or to undergo entry screening, or an individual removes their mask upon screening in our facility. Regardless of the reason for the refusal — medical reasons or a claim of personal freedom to refuse — use these points as a guide for your interactions.

Monitoring and enforcing physical/social distancing should be promoted by everyone. All UPMC employees can play a role in masking, maintaining appropriate social and physical distance themselves, and encourage patients and visitors to do the same. Signage, verbal direction, and floor clings for wait lines available for order in the Print Shop, are all effective ways to remind individuals about appropriate distance.

Staff should use discretion in enforcing masking requirements among patients. As a general rule, patients who are in public areas, including hallways during transport, and accompanied in their room are asked to mask. For some patients with breathing difficulties, disabilities, or certain conditions, masking may not be possible or recommended.

For the latest information on UPMC's screening or masking guidelines, search "[COVID-19 Screening](#)" or "[COVID-19 Masking](#)" on Infonet.

When the Patient (ED/OB) Refuses Masking or Screening

All incoming patients are required to undergo a health screening upon entry and, in keeping with UPMC and public health guidance, wear a mask from home or a facility-issued mask when in public and some clinical areas. *Note: If a patient arrives seeking emergency care, they must have a medical screening exam by a licensed independent practitioner, regardless of masking.*

- If incoming patient declines or refuses to wear a mask or is otherwise non-compliant, regardless of symptoms:
 - Take the patient to a private area isolated from others until a medical screening exam is completed by a provider donning appropriate PPE. *Explain: "Our masking and screening guidelines are designed for both your protection and the protection of other visitors and staff. We will need to keep you isolated here while care is provided for the safety of all."*
 - Provide care to the patient as needed while donning appropriate PPE.
- After the visit is complete, the patient should either mask, or exit the facility promptly for their safety.
- If a patient becomes disruptive at any point during the visit, speak softly and attempt to deescalate. Ask for help from a colleague or supervisor. If unable to deescalate, Security can be contacted and will engage accordingly. *Explain: "Without a mask, you are not permitted to be in public areas in our facility under our guidelines and under the advice of public officials. Thank you for understanding."*

When the Patient (Non-Emergent/Outpatient Procedural) Refuses Masking or Screening

All incoming patients are required to undergo a health screening upon entry and, in keeping with UPMC and public health guidance, wear a mask from home or a facility-issued mask when in public and in some clinical areas. *Note: In private rooms and private preprocedural/presurgical areas, asymptomatic patients may remove their masks absent of any other infection transmission concerns.*

- If incoming patient declines or refuses to wear a mask or is otherwise non-compliant:
 - Take the patient aside in a private area and *explain: "Our masking and screening guidelines are designed for both your protection and the protection of other visitors and staff. We will need to keep you isolated here while we contact the department you were visiting to see if they can safely accommodate you."*
 - Contact the clinical department or provider with whom the patient has an appointment and indicate that you have a patient that is refusing to mask within the facility, and ask if they can safely provide accommodations in the treatment of the patient. If the clinical department lead or provider states:

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- **Yes, the patient can be safely accommodated.** Escort the patient directly to the clinical department while maintaining social distance from the patient, check in with the front desk staff, and escort the patient directly to a private area. If a private room, direct patient to have a seat and close the door behind the patient when you leave the room. *Explain: “Your care team has indicated that they will be able to safely care for you today. We will need to go directly to a private area where you will be seen by your provider and receive care.”*
- **No, a conversation needs to occur with the patient to understand their situation.**
 - Inform the patient that the care delivery team needs to speak with them prior to their visit, and ask for a mobile phone number where they patient can be reached immediately for a conversation. *Explain: “The care team has indicated that they would like to call you prior to your visit to discuss the accommodations necessary for your care today. Do you have a mobile phone where they can call you right back? Let's step right outside here so you may have this conversation in private.”*
 - Relay the phone number of the patient to the care delivery team, and ask that they call the patient immediately to discuss, or send a representative to the screening entrance location. *Explain to the patient: “The care team will be calling you/will be sending a representative to discuss your appointment while you wait here.”*
- After the visit is complete, the patient should either mask, or exit the facility promptly for their safety.
- If a patient becomes disruptive at any point during the visit, speak softly and attempt to deescalate. Ask for help from a colleague or supervisor. If unable to deescalate, Security can be contacted and will engage accordingly. *Explain: “Without a mask, you are not permitted to be in public areas in our facility under our guidelines and under the advice of public officials. Thank you for understanding.”*

When a Visitor, Support Person, or Essential Vendor or Provider Refuses Masking or Screening

All incoming visitors are required to undergo a health screening upon entry and, in keeping with UPMC and public health official guidance, wear a mask from home or a facility-issued mask when in public and clinical areas.

- If incoming visitor declines or refuses to wear a mask or is otherwise non-compliant:
 - Take visitor aside outside screening area. *Explain: “Without a mask, you are not permitted to be in public areas in our facility under our guidelines and under the advice of public officials. We cannot permit you to enter our facility for the safety of our patients, visitors, and staff since you are not seeking care.”*
- If the visitor refuses to leave, or becomes disruptive at any point, Security can be contacted and will engage accordingly. *Reiterate: “Without a mask, you are not permitted to be in public areas in our facility under our guidelines and under the advice of public officials. Thank you for understanding.”*

When a Visitor, Support Person, or Essential Vendor Is Not Properly Masked in Areas Outside of the Screening Area

Masking is required in public and clinical areas. If you encounter someone not masked in public areas of the hospital who is not actively eating or drinking, address the issue:

- **Speak firmly, kindly, and confidently and inform of the rules.**
 - If mask is not visible, *explain: “In order to keep all of our patients, visitors, and staff safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19, universal masking is a requirement at UPMC. You must wear a mask. Do you have a mask on you? If not, I can help you to get one.”*
 - If mask is visible but not covering the face, *say, “I think you may have forgotten to put your mask on.”*

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- If mask is being worn but not worn properly, *explain: "It's great to see you have a mask! Did you know, though, that unless both your mouth and nose are covered, the mask is not very effective? Just that small adjustment can make a big impact in preventing potential spread of illness."*

Overall Situational Considerations

- Remain calm and speak in a firm, yet compassionate manner.
- Ask for assistance if you are not comfortable handling on your own, or if the situation is escalating.
- For situations involving admitted patients/inpatients, consult the [Universal Masking Guidelines](#) for clarity.
- If a patient, visitor, or guest requests an exemption from masking related to a disability, please contact the Disabilities Resource Center at 412-605-1483 between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Outside of standard operating hours, call the risk manager at 412-647-5511.

Key Phrases at Key Times

- If the **patient** presents a valid medical note/instruction from a doctor: *"Thank you for sharing this. We will do our best to provide safe and efficient care to you."*
- If a **patient/visitor** becomes loud or disruptive: *"I can understand that you are frustrated and am sorry that you are feeling this way."*