

WHY THE CHANGE TO N95 USE FOR COVID-19?

As many of you are aware, a change to N95 respirator use was recently made. Many of you are wondering why this was necessary. The reason why is very simple:

- OSHA passed an emergency temporary standard that differs from the evidence based recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control. This standard requires N95s to be worn by anyone with exposure to people suspected or known to have COVID-19 who meets the CDC criteria (time and distance) for exposure.

The change in PPE is not due to the Delta variant. The masks we have been using for routine care of our patients and using in the public settings have and continue to be very effective at keeping us from being infected in the workplace. We used N95s for aerosol producing procedures with great success.

So what do we know about the Delta variant in a nutshell?

- The delta variant is transmitted the same way as other COVID-19 variants.
- It spreads more efficiently due to viral load. Viral load means that infected people have more virus in their respiratory secretions, which means they breathe more out and people within 6 feet of them without their masks on will have more virus landing on their mucus membranes making infection more likely to occur.
- There is evidence emerging (and that we have witnessed at CHKD) that this is causing an increase in severe disease in children, young adults, pregnant women, etc.
- Most of the severe disease and deaths are occurring in unvaccinated people.
- Yes, there are break through cases, but they have generally been mild. And now, the CDC recommends a booster for the immunosuppressed and is planning to recommend a booster for those who have had the vaccine longer than 8 months or more ago. The wait is now for the FDA to approve it for Emergency Use, which is expected in September.

What is the good news?

- The vaccine is doing a good job preventing infection in some.
- ***It's doing a fantastic job in preventing severe disease, hospitalizations and death in the vaccinated population.***

Who is going to need to use an N95 or respirator and when?

Those who are in close contact (6 feet or closer for greater than 15 minutes cumulatively over a 24 hour period) to someone who meets the following criteria:

- 1) Positive COVID test in the prior 10 days
- 2) Exposure to COVID+ person in the past 14 days
- 3) Signs and symptoms of COVID19, including the normal respiratory findings, loss of taste and smell, etc. AND not tested or test pending

Who won't need them?

- Anyone in a setting that does not see patients
- People that may interact with patients and families but have physical barriers (acrylic style stands/guards), masks and eyewear to protect them.
- People who just walk by or have minimal contact (less than 15 min contact within 6 feet)

What does everyone need to do to protect ourselves in the workplace in the general work areas?

Continue to wear your face coverings or medical masks over your nose and mouth when you are closer than 6 feet to other people.

Do not eat within 6 feet of others at work regardless of vaccine status.

Perform hand hygiene

Keep your hands away from your face when interacting with others.

Keep areas disinfected.

Maintain a high suspicion for possible illness when you experience any signs or symptoms that could be COVID-19. Be aware that many people who test positive have had signs or symptoms that they have blamed on routine things like allergies or they assume it's just a regular cold.

Contact Infection Prevention and Control for infection prevention related questions.

Contact the Occupational Health Department for occupational health related questions.

Version 2.0

Infection Prevention and Control

9/1/2021