

Date: May 1, 2020

From: Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations (10N)

Subj: Update: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Mask Use in Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Facilities.

To: Network Directors (10N1-23)

1. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) response to provide a safe environment for employees and Veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic has included personal protective equipment (PPE), hand hygiene, physical distancing, screening for symptoms of disease, testing, exposure and contact tracing, and appropriate disinfection. Recently, VHA conducted a point prevalence study for COVID-19 on Veterans and staff living and working in Community Living Centers and Spinal Cord Injury Units. The study identified several facilities with asymptomatic, COVID-19 positive Veterans and staff. As a result of these findings, VHA will institute source control masking measures by May 7, 2020.

2. Source control for a health care facility involves the use of a face covering on all individuals entering a facility, whether employees, patients, or visitors. Face coverings are normally cloth and are not considered PPE. The face covering must cover the mouth and nose, fit snugly, allow for breathing without restriction, and be laundered daily. Individuals should be informed to be careful when removing their face covering and not to touch their eyes, nose, and mouth when removing their face covering. Individuals should wash their hands immediately after removing their face covering. In addition, source control face coverings are to be provided to inpatients who move outside of their room. Information on face coverings from the CDC can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

3. All individuals entering a VHA facility have the option to bring their own face covering or be provided one by VHA for the duration of their time on campus. VHA staff that require additional respiratory protection to provide direct patient care (enter a room, interact within 6 feet) and/or evaluate any suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infected patients will receive appropriate PPE including surgical masks and/or N95 respirators or PAPRS. All other staff, trainees, volunteers, Veterans, inpatient residents, and visitors are required to wear a face covering during their time at the VHA facility. The appropriate respiratory protection PPE will be provided to staff conducting home visits to Veterans.

4. Questions regarding this memorandum, please contact Larry Mole, Deputy Chief Officer in Patient Care Services for Public Health, by sending an email to

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Larry.Mole@va.gov. This guidance will be continually reviewed and updated.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sammy Garcia". The signature is written in a cursive style.

for
Renee Oshinski