

The Office of Patient Experience's mission is to ensure consistent, relationship-centered care by partnering with caregivers to exceed the expectations of patients and families.

When a Patient Refuses to Wear a Mask

Scenario

A patient is refusing to wear a mask and/or questioning why they are required to wear one.

- **Hear – Listen to and understand concerns. Approach with empathetic curiosity.**
 - Have open body language. Avoid multi-tasking to demonstrate listening.
 - **Say:** “It sounds like you have concerns about wearing a mask. Can you tell me more about that?”
 - AND/OR: “I appreciate you sharing that [spoken with warmth and genuine appreciation followed by a pause, then genuine curiosity].”
 - AND/OR: “Others have shared similar concerns. Help me understand what concerns you most.”
- **Empathize - Acknowledge the emotion**
 - Verbally acknowledge.
 - **Say:** “I know wearing a mask can feel uncomfortable. It can also make it difficult to hear what people are saying. I miss seeing everyone’s faces.”
 - AND/OR: “This has to be so stressful for you. I understand this feels like an imposition.”
 - AND/OR: “Many patients are nervous about coming in as it is — I don’t want to add to your stress AND safety is our top concern for everyone.”
- **Apologize – Express Regret of Situation**
 - Offer apologies on how challenging these times are AND communicate expectation.
 - **Say:** “Masks are <uncomfortable/frustrating/hot etc.> and I am sorry.”
 - AND/OR: “I am sorry you have to go through this when you are experiencing your health concerns and just trying to get better. I wish there was an easier way to keep everyone safe.”
- **Respond – Take Action**
 - Explain why appropriate actions must be taken by all.
 - **Say:** “We are asking everyone to wear masks while in our facilities to help keep our caregivers, patients and our visitors safe. There is no way of knowing who has or doesn’t have COVID-19 by looking at them. Your safety is most important.”
 - AND/OR: “We’ve heard from other patients that having everyone in a mask makes them feel most comfortable.”
 - AND/OR: “We’ve made masks conveniently available. I have one here, and can help you.”
 - AND/OR: “Encouraging everyone to wear a mask over their nose, mouth and chin helps us reduce the spread of infection.”
 - *Ambulatory:* For your safety and the safety of all, we ask that you wear a mask while inside.
- **Thank – Show Appreciation and Bring Closure**
 - Thank them for properly donning the mask.
 - **Say:** “I want to thank you for keeping us all safe. It is an act of kindness for all of us in these times. I appreciate your help with this. Thank you for trusting us with your care.”
 - *Ambulatory:* If a person still refuses to wear a mask, say, “Masks are required. I can offer you a face shield to wear instead of a mask. Would you like me to get you one?”
 - *Ambulatory:* If person still refuses a mask or face shield, you can say, “I am sorry, but at this time one of these options is required. If you do not wish to wear these, we can cancel your appointment for today and perhaps a virtual visit can be arranged later. If you would like to file a complaint about our policy, you can contact the Ombudsman Office at 216.444.2544 or ombudsman@ccf.org.”

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Specific Strategies

- **“I Wear Because I Care”**
 - Wearing masks helps protect others, not only you.
 - A mask is an easy way to demonstrate we are all in this together.
 - Verbally thank caregivers wearing appropriate masking for showing concern for others.

- **Prepare Your Approach**
 - Take a few calming breaths. Potential conflict can be uncomfortable and that is an OK way to feel.
 - Use open and friendly body language. Avoid crossing your arms or placing hands on hips.
 - Be specific to masking, redirect away from personal views.
 - Assume positive intent of other people. Do not enter the situation ready to judge or blame another.

- **Provide Empathetic Delivery**
 - Lower your voice. It naturally causes others to lower their voice, too.
 - Behaviors continue because people believe it is allowed.
 - Use pausing or silence after delivering the message. Sometimes people need time to process the information they receive.

- **If HEART language is not effective, consider CUS words for safety:**
 - **Concerned:** “I am **concerned** that you are not wearing a mask, can you tell me more about why?”
 - **Uncomfortable:** “It makes me feel **uncomfortable** that you are not masking because of the spread of COVID-19.”
 - **Safety Issue:** “Proper masking helps us ensure **safe care** environments. We all have to do our part.”

- **Refer to the Appropriate Parties as Needed**
 - Utilize your supervisor or HR business partner.
 - Remember Caring for Caregivers resources.
 - Refer patient to the Ombudsman Office, 216.444.2544 or send an email to ombudsman@ccf.org and alert them of your conversation, if patient wishes to file a complaint.