

# Experts say it's not yet time to take off masks in the health care setting

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A new commentary from infectious disease experts at George Washington University School of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) says for patient safety, masking should continue in health

care settings. This message conflicts with a recent commentary from authors from eight U.S. institutions suggesting that the time for universal masking is over. The commentary is published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

Masking has been a controversial mitigation strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic because high-quality evidence of efficacy is lacking and because the topic has become highly politicized. Regardless, real-world experience demonstrates the effectiveness of mask-wearing in [clinical settings](#) where data shows that transmission from patient-to-staff and staff-to-patient, when both are masked, is uncommon. Since [health care personnel](#) report being driven to show up for work even when they are ill themselves, the argument in support of mask-wearing becomes even more compelling.

Those without symptoms may also transmit respiratory viruses, particularly SARS-CoV-2. While the omicron strain has been milder, infection could still cause severe or life-threatening disease or prolonged illness if transmitted to at-risk patients, such as the elderly or immunocompromised. With the still-looming risks, now does not seem the time to take off masks in the health care setting. Instead, the authors advocate strongly for continued mask use for [infection](#) prevention.

**More information:** *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.7326/M23-1190](#). [www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M23-1190](http://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M23-1190)

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