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CLINICAL BULLETIN			
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#2022-02-07-02	Masking During Highly Transmissible Variants		February 7, 2022
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The development of the Omicron variant of coronavirus and the resultant increased transmissibility combined with a larger risk of breakthrough infections has had tremendous impact on the collective health care system in Maine, including the EMS system. Maine is presently experiencing both increased levels of admissions to hospitals while at the same time experiencing the highest level of health care worker infections. This combination leads to a potential vulnerability in the health care system’s response to this pandemic.

Given the increasing possibility of “pandemic fatigue” as the response to COVID persists and to maintain the EMS system’s availability, the MDPB requests that EMS agency leadership and EMS clinicians throughout the state consider the following actions:

1. Continue practicing excellent protective measures, including **appropriate PPE**, especially if aerosolized procedures are necessary for patient treatment. These include administration of nebulizers, any airway management interventions, chest compressions, etc. (Please refer to the November 2020 Clinical Bulletin on Aerosol-Generating Procedures, available at [this link](#), and the July 2020 updated Pandemic Response Protocols available at [this link](#).)
2. Given significantly increased of transmission witnessed with the Omicron variant, if possible, consider wearing N95s with all patient contacts. In addition, please recall that comprehensive protection against all strains of COVID-19 includes eye protection.
3. Continue protecting other patients and staff members by **ensuring that all patients are masked** when transferred from the scene to the ambulance and from the ambulance to the hospital. This includes placing a surgical mask over the vents of nonbreathers or the exhalation port of a nebulizer if the patient’s acuity necessitates continued use of these interventions during transport. Whenever possible, consider administering these interventions in an open and well-ventilated space. Please do not deliver nebulized medications while moving a patient through an emergency department hallway.

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4. To further minimize the potential spread of COVID in a residence or healthcare facility (e.g., emergency department, hospital, nursing home), please be sure to **close the bedroom/exam room door** once you leave the scene/hospital.
5. Please consider following CDC guidelines regarding masking and social distancing including **always wearing masks when around other persons outside of your household, even in your personal life**. This is especially important when in public, not only on scenes, but also while performing routine, daily activities. With increasing transmission demonstrated by the Omicron variant, protection even during personal activities is essential to maintain your availability to respond during this phase of the pandemic. The MDPB recognizes and respects your autonomy and choices but asks you to consider masking outside of your professional responsibilities as a strategy to continue dampening the spread of the Omicron variant and maintain our collective workforce's ability to care for patients. EMS Clinicians are commonly the face of the healthcare system in their communities and thus, the public looks to you and your example regarding safe practices. Maintaining safe practices, even off duty, sets an example for the public at large.
6. Many of the outbreaks in healthcare settings have come from co-worker spread while on the job. Please continue to **mask while on duty**, in the station, and when performing professional activities, even when not caring for patients.

Thank you all for your continued hard work, flexible patient care, and relentless community protection during these unprecedented times. Please reach out to Maine EMS or any MDPB member with any questions.