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Memorandum

TO: Health Care Facility Chief Executive Officers and Administrators
Emergency Medical Service Directors

FROM: Elizabeth Daake Kelley, MPH, MBA, Director
Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality

SUBJECT: Organizational Policies and Procedures for Mitigating Respiratory Illness

DATE: May 5, 2023

As the state Public Health Emergency ends on May 11, 2023 and COVID-19 prevalence across Massachusetts is no longer high, the Department of Public Health's (DPH) Public Health Emergency Order directing universal facemask use for all individuals, including healthcare personnel (HCP) in health care settings will also terminate. However, consistent with DPH health care facility and emergency medical service (EMS) licensure regulations, the purpose of this memorandum is to remind health care facilities and EMS providers of their ongoing obligation to develop, implement and maintain evidence-based infection prevention and control policies and procedures for their organizations.

Health care facilities and EMS providers are expected to develop and update their infection prevention and control policies to incorporate actions the licensee will take to mitigate the risk of transmission of respiratory illness, including but not limited to COVID-19 and influenza, within their facilities, particularly during periods when there are increased levels of respiratory illness in their communities. Health care facilities and EMS providers should identify and monitor respiratory illness metrics to indicate when there are increased levels which necessitate implementing additional infection control measures.

- **Examples of potential metrics** include, but are not limited to, increase in outbreaks of healthcare-onset respiratory infections, increase in emergency department or outpatient visits related to respiratory infections, and increase in wastewater SARS-CoV2 levels.

- **Mitigation measures to be included** in a licensee's infection prevention and control policies and procedures should include but are not limited to implementing masking for health care personnel (HCP) and visitors, and patients/residents as able, increasing ventilation within the facility, and offering respiratory vaccination clinics. This can include universal masking, which means having everyone wear a mask upon entry. Such an approach could be implemented facility-wide or could be targeted toward higher risk areas (e.g., emergency departments, urgent care, units experiencing an outbreak, units providing care to severely immunocompromised individuals) based on a facility risk assessment.