Use of face masks on IRMCT premises

In the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, many national governments and other institutions are encouraging or mandating the use of face masks[*] to help prevent the spread of the novel SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus and reduce COVID-19 infection.

Having considered the medical situation, national rules and guidelines,[†] UN guidance,[‡] the parameters of the Mechanism's physical premises and the policies of relevant institutions, and taking into account consistent advice that face masks should be used in circumstances where social distancing cannot be ensured;

Having further considered Mechanism measures taken to contribute to reducing the risk of spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, including (i) social distancing requirements in the Mechanism's premises; (ii) the strong recommendation that staff work remotely where their functions allow, and "at risk" staff at all times; (iii) proper hygiene practices in the workplace such as use of hand sanitizers; (iv) a prohibition on entry to the premises by those showing symptoms of or who are infected with COVID-19; (v) a prohibition on entry to the premises by more than five official visitors at a time; and (vi) assessment of ventilation systems;

The Mechanism has adopted the following position on the use of masks:

- Mechanism staff are reminded of their obligations to fully comply with national regulations concerning the use of face masks outside the Mechanism's premises.
- The use of face masks in the Mechanism's premises is mandatory for all persons, including all non-staff, at all duty stations.
- Face masks must be worn in all indoor spaces in the premises, with the exception of offices where appropriate social distancing can be maintained.

All persons entering the Mechanism's premises are responsible for obtaining face masks, with the exception that the Mechanism will issue appropriate personal protective equipment to staff members in the SSS, FMU and the MU when required for the performance of their responsibilities. To assist, the Mechanism is providing a set of two reusable face masks to all staff members.

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[*] "Face masks" are distinguishable from respirators. While respirators (such as N95/FFP2 standard filtering facepieces) prevent infection by filtering virus particles prior to inhalation, face masks (both surgical and cloth) are used to prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2 by reducing the exhalation of virus particles into the air. Face masks should therefore be understood primarily as for the protection of others, rather than the protection of the user.

[†] E.g. CDC guidance on cloth face coverings, available at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html;
European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control guidance on using face masks in the community, available at https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/COVID-19-use-face-masks-community.pdf; and
https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2020/10/02/wearing-of-face-masks-strongly-advised.

[‡] See, e.g., UN-Department of Operational Support advisory of 10 November 2020 on the use of masks for UN personnel in non-healthcare settings in areas of COVID-19 community transmission, at https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/ddcoronavirus_ppeforwardfacingstaff.pdf;
WHO's advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19 available at https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-masks and pp. 7-8 of https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)-outbreak.

In addition, in light of the same considerations, as well as the particular circumstances of external contractors regularly present at all premises, external contractors are required to wear a face mask in all indoor areas, including offices, and are encouraged to use face masks when working outside the building when safe distance from others cannot be maintained.

It is important that face masks be used properly to ensure both effectiveness and safety. The Mechanism advises that the following measures be taken:

- The face mask is to cover both nose and mouth, and must fit snuggly without leaving gaps between skin and mask.
- Touching the face mask increases the risk of contaminating one's hands. The face mask should not be touched other than when putting it on or taking it off.
- Put on and take off the mask off by using the straps. Do not touch the front of the mask.
- Wash hands every time after touching the face mask.
- The face mask must be replaced when it is damp.
- In order to prevent risk of infection to cleaners, used disposable face masks must either be deposited in the designated bins or taken off premise for proper disposal. Reusable face masks must be taken off premises by the user for proper disposal or washing.

Staff should be aware of medical advice that face masks should not be worn by persons who have trouble breathing and that there may be a risk of transmission from improper handling of masks. Staff are reminded that even when they wear masks they should continue to observe social distancing and comply with personal hygiene guidelines.

The Mechanism will monitor the medical situation and advice of Host States and WHO, and update this policy as appropriate.

Adopted by the COVID-19 Management Team
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