Swissnoso recommendations: In-room surgical masks for hospitalized patients during the Covid-19 pandemic
(Version 1.0, Swissnoso, 17th November 2020)

There is currently no evidence that having inpatients (with or without Covid-19) wear surgical masks in their room reduces nosocomial transmissions. For the protection of healthcare workers, in the context of other respiratory infections such as influenza, the standard for the healthcare worker is to wear a mask in the patient room (but not for the patient). Only during activities outside the patient room do established measures require the patient to wear a mask.

Given that the acute care hospital is a relatively controlled environment where clinical encounters are often plannable, we argue against requiring all inpatients (with or without Covid-19) to wear a surgical mask at all times. This is under the assumption that a masking policy for healthcare workers is in place.

Swissnoso recommends that hospitalized patients with active Covid-19 infection wear a surgical mask in their room in select situations with the intention of further reducing an already low transmission risk. These situations include:
- the patient has contact < 1.5 m with any person in the room (healthcare worker, visitor)
- when the patient leaves his/her bed to ambulate in a multi-bed room

On the other hand, masks must not be worn if:
- the patient cannot tolerate it (e.g., when experiencing dyspnea, anxiety, or agitation)
- the patient does not understand or cannot comply with the correct masking procedure (e.g., dementia or confusion)
- they interfere with clinical assessment (e.g., central cyanosis not being detected due to the mask)
- they interfere with nursing activities (e.g., oral care)
- the patient is receiving any type of invasive or non-invasive ventilation
- the patient sleeps
- the patient is <12 years of age

Further, Swissnoso strongly suggests that all inpatients (with or without Covid-19) wear a surgical mask when the local 14-day population incidence of Covid-19 cases is >60 / 100'000 population, using the indications and contraindications above.

Note. If the healthcare worker is wearing a mask but the patient is not (for whatever reason), this is considered a protected contact given that it occurred in the controlled setting of a hospital.