



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Phoebe Suspends Universal Masking Requirement

Albany, Ga. – As of Friday morning, these were Phoebe’s COVID-19 numbers:

- Total COVID-19 Patients in Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital – 8
- Total COVID-19 Patients in Phoebe Sumter Medical Center – 0
- Total COVID-19 Patients in Phoebe Worth Medical Center – 1
- Total Inpatients Recovered – 4,795
- Total Positive Deaths from Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital – 468
- Total Positive Deaths from Phoebe Sumter – 127
- Total Positive Deaths from Phoebe Worth – 1
- Total Vaccines Administered – 81,706

With COVID hospitalizations remaining low, and in response to new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Phoebe has suspended universal masking requirements at its facilities. “The safety of our patients, visitors and employees must always be our top priority,” said Dianna Grant, MD, Phoebe Putney Health System Chief Medical Officer. “With less COVID transmission, we are comfortable revising our masking rules, but there will remain certain areas where masks will still be required to protect patients and staff members.”

Masking for visitors and staff will still be required throughout Phoebe emergency centers, cancer center and patient floors (including waiting areas), as well as all other patient care areas. Anyone experiencing symptoms of COVID or other contagious respiratory illnesses will also be required to wear a surgical mask. Otherwise, masks will no longer be required in non-clinical departments and other areas where direct interactions with patients do not occur.

“Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have consistently followed CDC guidelines regarding use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in our facilities. Recently, the CDC updated its recommendations, allowing healthcare organizations to cease universal masking as long as

community transmission in their locations is not listed as 'high.' The communities we serve currently fall under that guidance, so we are loosening our masking rules," Dr. Grant said.

If community transmission levels increase to the "high" category, Phoebe will return to universal masking. PPE rules for interactions with confirmed or suspected COVID patients are not changing.

While the number of COVID cases will likely increase over the next couple of months, a major surge is less likely. "We are in a much better place now than the last two winters when we endured large COVID waves. People can help ensure that we don't have another big winter surge by getting a COVID booster shot. The updated bivalent boosters provide excellent protection against the current dominant strains of the virus," Dr. Grant said.

Even though the flu season hit Georgia early, it is certainly not too late to get a flu shot, and Phoebe also encourages everyone to get that vaccination to help avoid an increase in flu and COVID cases at the same time. Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) also remains a threat, especially to young children and those over age 65. Proper hand hygiene, avoiding close contact with anyone with symptoms and staying home if you have symptoms will help reduce the spread of RSV, the flu and COVID.

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