



A written exemption by a Health Care Practitioner is not required and does not necessarily exempt patients from a Public Health Order mandating Masking.

Please refer to the details of the relevant [Public Health Order](#).

How could a mask exemption guideline help you when discussing with your patient a request for a mask exemption?

A masking exemption guideline helps you have conversations with your patients about the importance of masking and how to keep them and their loved ones safe and healthy. This document is based on medical evidence.

Why should my patients wear a mask during the COVID pandemic?

Current Public Health orders may mandate your patient to wear a mask.

Organizations such as businesses and schools may have policies which require individuals to wear masks.

Masking provides:

- source control of spread from patients who have COVID-19, whether symptomatic or not.
- protection for the wearer of the mask by preventing COVID carrying droplets from striking their mucous membranes in the mouth and nares.
- some protection against severe COVID disease.

What are medical reasons to provide an exemption to wearing a mask?

- Children under 2 years of age
- Anyone unconscious
- Anyone incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove a mask without assistance
- Based on clinical judgement, anyone suffering clinically significant acute respiratory distress

Who else might have difficulties wearing a mask and what should they do? Are there adaptations or alternatives available?

Wearing a mask might be difficult for some persons, including those living with cognitive impairment, development challenges and some persons with mental health conditions. Examples include:

- people, especially children, with severe sensory processing disorders.
- people with facial deformities.
- children less than 5 years of age who refuse to wear a face covering and cannot be persuaded to.
- people with PTSD who are triggered by a mask.
- extreme agoraphobia/asphyxia phobia (which is longstanding predating COVID-19).
- people with cognitive impairment, intellectual deficiency or autism spectrum disorder for whom wearing a mask will cause severe distress or disorganization.

Adaptations and alternatives to consider:

- Altering the straps to increase the feasibility of wearing a mask.
- Optimizing treatment for those with underlying mental health conditions such as untreated or inadequately treated anxiety, phobias and other mental health condition may improve mask tolerance.

If a mask cannot be tolerated, it is strongly recommended that indoor public spaces be avoided.



***Note:** The masking exemption guidelines were created by a working group of expert clinicians from the fields of respiratory medicine, infectious disease, public health, emergency medicine, pediatric infectious disease, psychiatry, family medicine and critical care from the Saskatchewan Health Authority, the University of Saskatchewan and the Government of Saskatchewan.

A comprehensive review of evidence was the foundation of this work. Worldwide evidence was collected, collated and reviewed by the COVID-19 Rapid Evidence Reviews think-tank. This organization utilizes researchers and content experts at the University of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Health Authority and the Saskatchewan Health Quality Council to evaluate available evidence on COVID-19 in order to make the best informed decision to protect our patients and residents.