

Background

On May 13, 2021, the Government of Alberta passed an order requiring any Albertan seeking an exemption to public mask use to have a letter from either a physician, nurse practitioner or psychologist. The **only** criteria for which physicians can issue a medical exemption letter include:

- Sensory processing disorders
- Developmental delay
- Cognitive impairment
- Mental illnesses including:
 - anxiety disorders
 - psychotic disorders
 - dissociative identity disorder
 - depressive disorders
- Facial trauma or recent oral maxillofacial surgery
- Contact dermatitis or allergic reactions to mask components
- Clinically significant acute respiratory distress

Physicians can bill for the patient assessment, however providing the letter itself is a third-party, uninsured service. Physicians should follow CPSA's standard of practice on [Charging for Uninsured Professional Services](#) and direct any questions about billing to Alberta Health or the AMA.

Professional Judgment

In the following circumstances, physicians should use their best clinical judgment when providing medical exemption letters:

- Physicians should only provide medical exemption letters when their patient meets the criteria noted above and the physician provides treatment for the condition noted above.
 - Physicians should balance the risk to the patient and others from not wearing a mask, with the severity of the condition making the patient exempt.
- Physicians are not obligated to provide an exemption letter if their clinical judgment determines the patient does not qualify. Such decisions should be documented in the patient's chart. Where applicable, physicians should consider/document the reason for mask anxiousness and provide guidance on overcoming mask anxiety.
- It is important to note a patient may use the exemption as evidence to dispute a fine related to non-compliance with public mask use. Therefore, it is important to use sound rationale in decision-making around provision of an exemption.

Physicians may be at risk of unprofessional conduct if they:

Physician Guidance on Medical Exemption Letters

- Create a blanket rule to **not** provide medical exemption letters at all, even to patients they are treating for the conditions noted above.
- Over-issuing medical exemption letters, using poor clinical judgment to justify the exemption.