

FAQs: Exemption Requests for Mandatory Masking

What are the current criteria for masking exemptions?

Province-wide requirements for indoor public masking were reinstated by Alberta Health on September 4, 2021. Chief Medical Officer of Health [Order 40-2021](#) sets out that **the only health conditions** for which masking exemptions may be issued are:

- 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.

A patient's moral objection to masking is not considered a sufficient clinical reason to be given an exemption.

Who can issue an exemption from masking requirements?

Exemptions from masking requirements in indoor public spaces and workplaces can only be issued by a physician, nurse practitioner or psychologist.

Is my physician obligated to provide me with an exemption letter?

No. Physicians are not obligated to provide an exemption letter if their clinical judgment determines a patient does not qualify. Physicians may only use the criteria for mask exemption listed above in assessing a patient's request. However, having one of the conditions listed does not automatically qualify a patient for a mask exemption.

Can I go to any physician to request a mask exemption?

No. Please see your primary care physician to request a medical exemption letter. Your primary care physician will use their clinical judgement to determine if you qualify. Do not request mask exemptions from an emergency room physician.

What should I expect when I ask my physician for a mask exemption?

Your physician will assess whether you qualify for an exemption based on the criteria provided by the Chief Medical Office of Health. This assessment may be conducted in-person or virtually. It is possible your physician will determine you are not eligible for an exemption.

Why wouldn't a physician provide a mask exemption?

A physician may deny an exemption request if the clinical judgement is that the patient's condition can be treated in a manner that allows for mask use. A physician could also be investigated for unprofessional conduct if they provide a mask exemption for a condition that is not consistent with the public health order.

Can I complain to CPSA if I am denied an exemption request?

CPSA expects physicians to assess all patient requests for mask exemptions. CPSA would only investigate a complaint if a physician has refused to provide an assessment, or if the physician issued an exemption beyond the criteria for mask exemption listed above. CPSA accepts evidence-based clinic judgement and will not overturn the decision of a physician.

What happens if patients become verbally or physically abusive?

Patients who do not receive the response they are hoping for must treat the physician, clinic staff and other patients with respect. Patients cannot put undue pressure on the physician and must understand the physician's obligation to uphold the public health order. Abusive patients will be asked to leave the premises and may be subject to termination of their relationship with the physician and prosecution by law enforcement.

How quickly will my physician respond to a request for a mask exemption?

Physicians have a responsibility to triage and manage their patients' needs, ensuring those with an urgent, serious need for care are prioritized for evaluation. Depending on your physician's workload, a request for a mask exemption assessment may require advance booking or deferral to a future appointment.

Do I need to carry a mask exemption with me at all times?

Mask exemption letters may be requested when you visit indoor settings in Alberta. It would be helpful to others if you keep this letter with you at all times. If you are issued a ticket for not wearing a mask, you will need to provide the letter to the courts to prove you qualify for a mask exemption.

If I am not given an exemption, does that mean I need to wear a mask at all times?

There are some situations where mandatory masking is not required. First, masking is recommended, but not required, in outdoor settings. Also, [Alberta Health](#) states that indoor masking is not required:

- In K-12 schools, unless mandated by the school board (Masking is required in post-secondary institutions).
- While participating in a physical fitness or performance activity.
- While participating in a worship service in a place of worship.
- If an individual is unable to place, use or remove a face mask without assistance.
- While seated and consuming food or drink.
- While providing or receiving care or assistance where a face mask would hinder that caregiving or assistance.

- Where an individual is alone at a workstation and separated by at least two metres distance from all other persons.
- Where a workplace hazard assessment has determined that the worker's safety will be at risk if the person wears a mask while working.
- Where an individual is separated from every other person by a physical barrier that prevents droplet transmission.
- If a person needs to temporarily remove their face mask while in the public place for the purposes of receiving a service that requires the temporary removal of their face mask, emergency or medical treatment or establishing their identity.

Can my physician be exempt from wearing a mask?

All physicians providing patient care in community medical clinics are expected to wear a surgical/procedure mask at all times. However, in cases where a physician cannot wear a mask and they have a medical exemption letter, they must interact with patients in a way that offers at least as much protection as masking. For example, they might:

- switch to virtual appointments and assessments
- postpone procedures requiring interaction at a distance of less than two metres
- refer patients to other physicians

How can I protect myself and others if I have a mask exemption?

A mask exemption is not a "free pass." Not wearing a mask in indoor public places will increase the risk of acquiring and transmitting COVID-19. We encourage those with mask exemptions to notify medical clinics in advance of in-person visits. This will allow the facility to enact precautions that will protect you, clinic staff and other patients. You can support safety by making appointments, being open to virtual assessments and waiting in your vehicle until your appointment time.