

FAQs: Requests for Medical Exemptions from Masking

What are the current provincial requirements for masking?

There are currently no province-wide requirements for indoor masking set out by Alberta Health or the Government of Alberta. However, many workplaces, including health care facilities and medical clinics, request that visitors and staff wear masks to reduce the likelihood of infection transmission to those who are vulnerable. Masking may also be required for some types of travel.

What criteria will be considered if a patient requests a mask exemption?

The suggested warranting health conditions for which masking exemptions may be issued are:

- Sensory processing disorders.
- Developmental delay.
- Cognitive impairment.
- Clinically significant 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. It is also important to note that having one or more of the health conditions listed does not automatically obligate the physician to provide a mask exemption.

Who can issue a medical exemption from masking?

Medical exemptions from masking should only be issued by the patient's primary care physician, nurse practitioner or psychologist.

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

No. Physicians will use their clinical judgement to evaluate the patient's condition and are not obligated to provide an exemption letter upon request. Further, having one of the health conditions listed does not automatically obligate the physician to provide a mask exemption.

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

CPSA recommends that, wherever possible, patients see their family physician to request exemption letter. Primary care physicians 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 consider your overall health profile, along with the suggested warranting health conditions, to determine whether an exemption is appropriate for you. 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 a mask exemption request for many reasons. For example, a physician may determine that a patient's health condition is treatable and that masking remains possible during treatment. Physicians are obligated to use sound clinical reasoning when providing exemptions.

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 was reported to be issuing exemptions without sound clinical reasoning. CPSA supports the physician's clinical judgement and will not overturn these decisions.

What happens if a patient becomes 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 protect their staff and other patients. 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?

It can be hard to predict when exemption letters may be requested, so it is suggested that you keep this letter with you at all times. Medical clinics are under no obligation to attest on your behalf that an exemption has been provided.

Are physicians required to wear a mask?

Many physicians, and their clinic staff, choose to continue to wear masks at all times, however they are not obligated to do so. Physicians and clinic staff are required to assess each patient's condition and choose the appropriate personal protective equipment that will minimize infection transmission. Whether a physician wears a mask is dependent on the type of illness that the patient is presenting with.

Can I ask my physician to wear a mask during an assessment?

A patient can express their preference that a physician wears a mask during in-person assessments. Physicians are recommended to honour these requests, but are only required to wear a mask when the patient's symptoms place them at risk of infection transmission.

Can my physician ask me to wear a mask when I arrive to a clinic?

Physicians can request that patients put on a mask while in the clinic. Clinic staff have an obligation to prevent the spread of infection among staff and patients and may determine that masks are necessary to help in this regard. However, patients cannot be refused service or treatment if they cannot, or will not, wear a mask. CPSA has outlined several options for physicians in these instances.