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Visit www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/fundamentals/masks.html for the latest Mask Guidance for Manitobans.

Under what circumstances will a student be exempt from wearing a mask?

Public health officials advise that inappropriate exemptions to mandated mask wearing have the potential to inadvertently compromise the overall public health measures implemented in schools to mitigate risk to all and to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in Manitoba schools and communities.

School divisions and independent schools shall only grant exemptions to mandated mask wearing for the following specified circumstances:

- children under the age of two years
- children under the age of five years, either chronologically or developmentally, who refuse to wear a face covering and cannot be persuaded to do so by their caregiver
- people, especially children, with severe sensory processing disorders
- people with facial deformities that are incompatible with masking
- people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who are triggered by a face covering
- people with extreme agoraphobia/asphyxia phobia (which is long standing and pre-dating COVID-19)
- people with a cognitive impairment, intellectual deficiency, or autism spectrum disorder for who wearing a face covering will cause severe distress or disorganization
- people with a medical condition unrelated to COVID-19, including breathing or cognitive difficulties or a disability, which prevents them from safely wearing a mask
- people who are unable to apply or remove a mask without help

In a case where a student is having active breathing difficulties, the student will be advised to remove their mask and the parent/guardian/caregiver will be contacted to pick up the student to seek medical attention.

What should a parent/guardian/caregiver do if their child should be exempt from wearing a mask?

If a parent/guardian/caregiver is concerned about their child's ability to safely wear a mask on the school bus or while at school, they should speak with their child's medical doctor or nurse practitioner. If the child is either unable to properly wear a mask or has a medical condition that does not allow them to wear a mask, the parent/guardian/caregiver must provide written notification to the child's school, specifying the child's specific limitation with wearing a mask from the list above.

A note from a medical doctor or nurse practitioner is not required by the Department of Education; however, the school division or independent school has the discretion to request a note be provided by a parent/guardian/caregiver from a medical doctor or nurse practitioner.

Students who are granted an exemption from mandatory mask wearing and who do not wear a mask on the school bus may be seated on the bus in the same seat as household members. They should not be seated with any other passenger from their class or cohort who is not a household member.

In the case of cohorts, if a student has been granted an exemption to mandatory mask wearing, the recommendation in the classroom is unchanged for these students. There is no requirement to adjust the cohort or the seating plan in the class.

For those who are granted exemptions to mandatory mask wearing, it is important to continue practising all the public health fundamentals, including staying home when ill, frequent hand washing with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer, covering coughs, and physical distancing.

Additional Resources

- Visit the Health Canada website (at www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/video/covid-19-wear-non-medical-mask-face-covering-properly.html) for more information on how to wear a mask properly.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada provides a poster and guidelines for how to safely use a non-medical mask or face covering: www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/covid-19-safely-use-non-medical-mask-face-covering.html.