

RLMA MASK EXEMPTION POLICY

The current evidence for masking during COVID 19 outweighs any theoretical risks, therefore we believe that ALL people should wear appropriate masks/face covering AND keep 2 metres physical distance apart from others and frequently wash their hands or use approved hand sanitizer.

Inappropriate medical exemptions may spread COVID19 in our community & result in severe illnesses & deaths.

There may be exemptions such as:

- Adults & children with autism, intellectual challenges or dementia who are caused severe distress by wearing a face covering
- People with facial deformities that prevent masking
- Young children who refuse to wear a face covering & cannot be persuaded to do so
- People with diagnosed PTSD who are triggered by a face covering or those with extreme agoraphobia/asphyxia phobia (which is longstanding predating COVID 19)
- People with applicable accommodations under the Ontario Human Rights Code or the Accessibility for Ontarians with a Disabilities Act that would pertain to wearing a face covering (needing a wheelchair would not qualify)

PLEASE NOTE:

- Discomfort including skin irritation caused by the mask is NOT a reason for exemption
- If you believe you should be exempted or if you want to discuss your concerns, please call the clinic for a virtual (telephone or video) appointment.
- People who are not wearing a face covering should not enter any indoor public spaces.
- Masks with exhalation valves should NOT be used because they allow infectious respiratory droplets to spread outside the mask, do not protect others from COVID-19 and do not limit the spread of the virus.



- Patients wearing oxygen can safely wear a mask over top of their nasal tubing.
- We will **NOT** provide exemptions to patients with chronic lung disease.

People with chronic lung diseases such as asthma & COPD are at higher risk for severe disease from COVID-19. Having a chronic breathing problem is a compelling reason to wear a mask, not a reason for an exemption

Asthma is NOT a reason to not wear a mask

COPD (including chronic bronchitis & emphysema) is NOT a reason to not wear a mask

re. patients with respiratory illnesses such as asthma & COPD:

“There is NO evidence that wearing a face mask will exacerbate an underlying lung condition.” The Canadian Thoracic Society (the professional society that provides asthma & COPD guidelines for physicians and patients)

re. feelings of anxiety or difficulty breathing when wearing a face mask:

Wearing a face mask may create feelings of anxiety & panic (including shortness of breath, which is a common symptom of anxiety). If you cannot tolerate wearing a facemask due to these symptoms, it is advised that you:

- *try different mask formats & materials to find one you feel is more tolerable*
- *try wearing the mask for short periods of time around home, slowly increasing the duration of wear at home until you can tolerate its use*
- *call & make an appointment with one of our counsellors who are experienced in working with patients with phobias & anxiety*
- *see a counsellor for support, tips, advice, desensitization, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*
- *if all else fails, avoid public indoor spaces & any circumstances in which physical distancing is not possible.*

Thank you

With thanks to the Happy Valley Family Health Team whose July 23, 2020 position statement was a resource for this one.

• References:

1. Canadian Thoracic Society recommendations regarding the use of face masks by the public during the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic June 2, 2020
2. Lung Association: Non-Medical Face Masks and COVID-19 www.lung.ca/covid19
3. Joint Statement on Importance of Patients with Chronic Lung Disease Wearing Facial Coverings During COVID 19 Pandemic (this is a joint statement by the American College of Chest Physicians, the American Lung Association, the American Thoracic Society and the COPD Foundation) July 17, 2020