

**Wilson Centre Family Practice Position Statement on Mask Exemptions  
October 2020**

We, the physicians of the Wilson Centre Family Practice, believe in providing the best care to our community. In light of increasing face mask recommendations, and phone calls from concerned patients, we have evaluated the current available evidence. **To date the current evidence for masking during the COVID-19 pandemic outweighs any theoretical risks. As such, we advocate for face masks, as well as maintaining a 2 meter physical distance whenever possible and diligent frequent hand washing (or the use of an alcohol based hand sanitizer). Patients of Wilson Centre are also reminded that for the safety of our patients, our staff, and our physicians, face coverings are required upon entering our building.**

Inappropriate medical exemptions for masks have the potential to inadvertently hasten the spread of COVID-19 in our community. However, there are exceptional circumstances which do warrant consideration of a mask exemption. These include:

- People, especially children, with severe sensory processing disorders
- Patients with facial deformities that are incompatible with masking
- Children less than 2 years of age
- Children less than 5 years of age (cognitively or developmentally) who refuse to wear a face covering and cannot be persuaded to
- People with a diagnosis of PTSD who are triggered by a face covering
- Extreme agoraphobia or asphyxia phobia (note: long standing predating the COVID-19 pandemic)
- People with cognitive impairment, intellectual deficiency, or autism spectrum disorder for whom wearing a face covering will cause severe distress or disorganization
- People unable to apply or remove a face covering without help

If you believe, based on the above criteria, that you warrant an exemption, or if you want to discuss your concerns, please call the clinic to book a virtual appointment at 604-942-7227.

**Of note, if someone is granted a mask exemption, we strongly recommend avoiding all indoor public spaces.**

Please note:

- Asthma is NOT considered a contraindication to mask wearing
- COPD (including chronic bronchitis and emphysema) is NOT considered a contraindication to mask wearing
- Discomfort caused by the mask is not considered an exemption
- Acne (or other skin issues) caused by face coverings is not considered an exemption
- Patients wearing oxygen can wear a mask over their nasal cannula. It does not impair the ability to continue to wear oxygen supply nor does it lower oxygen levels.

There is no evidence that wearing a mask or face covering will exacerbate underlying lung conditions such as asthma and COPD, per the Canadian Thoracic Society (the professional society that provides guidelines for care of patients with conditions such as asthma and COPD). In fact, individuals with chronic lung illnesses such as asthma and COPD are at a higher risk of severe disease secondary to SARS-CoV-12 (the virus that causes COVID-19). Having a chronic lung issue or breathing problem is a compelling reason to wear a mask, rather than to be exempt from one. As such, we will not be providing exemptions to patients with chronic lung diseases (unless they have another indication that precludes them wearing a covering in the list above).

We recognize that wearing a face covering or mask can cause feelings of anxiety or panic, including the sensation of shortness of breath. Some advice if you are having trouble tolerating wearing a mask due to these symptoms:

- Try different mask formats and materials to find one you feel is more tolerable (of note, masks with exhalation valves are NOT recommended)
- Try using the mask for short periods of time around the home then slowly increasing the duration of wearing it at home until you can tolerate the mask
- Consider a face shield long enough to extend past your chin. Though these are not considered as effective, they do provide effect and are considered an acceptable alternative in some businesses and indoor public spaces.
- Consider seeing a counselor for support, tips, advice, and desensitization techniques
- If all else fails, avoid public indoor spaces and any circumstances in which physical distancing (2m or more) is not possible.

We recognize this is a very difficult time for everyone and we appreciate your understanding, patience and compassion.

Sincerely,  
The Doctors of the Wilson Centre Family Practice

Dr. S. Barron, Dr. A. Cheong, Dr. N. Mortil, Dr. S. Gharedhagi, Dr. P. Brown, Dr. M. Hildebrand, Dr. M. Perez-Flores, Dr. K. Strong, Dr. I. Crothers, Dr. S. Hage-Moussa, Dr. P. Leung, Dr. S. Willoughby, Dr. H. Shortt, Dr. J. Romey, Dr. A. Cullen, Dr. T. Jacobs, Dr. S. Afzal

#### 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](http://www.lung.ca/covid19)
3. Joint Statement on the Importance of Patients with Chronic Lung Disease Wearing Facial Coverings During COVID-19 Pandemic: July 17, 2020 (this is a joint statement by the American College of Chest Physicians, the American Lung Association, the American Thoracic Society and the COPD Foundation)