



# COVID-19

## Planning resource: *mask exemptions*



### PROVINCIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR MASKS IN K-12 SCHOOLS

- The Provincial Health Officer's [Face Coverings Order](#) requires all K-12 staff, students and visitors to wear face coverings (masks) in schools and on buses.
- The [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines](#) (page.19) also requires K-12 students, staff and visitors to wear masks in schools and on school buses.
- Exemptions for visitors, staff, and students include\*:
  - If the person is unable to wear a mask because of:
    - A psychological, behavioural or health condition, or a physical, cognitive, or mental impairment, or
    - They are unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person.



### ADDRESSING MASK EXEMPTIONS FOR STUDENTS, STAFF AND VISITORS

Schools are expected to work with staff, students (*or their parents/caregivers, if applicable*) and visitors with mask exemptions to explore potential strategies to reinforce and enhance other safety measures to ensure their safety and the safety of others. They are not required to provide a doctor's note. Alternative measures must not be punitive or stigmatizing in nature, or prevent a student from attending or fully participating in-person at school.



The following strategies can support conversations between school staff, students and families regarding mask exemptions.

- Share information from the BC Centre for Disease Control on the [benefits of wearing masks](#). Key messages include:
  - *Masks have a role to play in preventing the spread of COVID-19, by helping to stop the spread of droplets from a person's mouth and nose when talking, laughing, yelling, singing, coughing, or sneezing.*
  - *Masks provide protection to the person wearing them **and to those around them.***
  - *Masks complement and build on the other safety measures in schools. They work best when everyone who can wear a mask is wearing one.*
  - *Mask requirements in K-12 schools are similar to requirements in other indoor public spaces (e.g., shopping malls, grocery stores, recreation centres, post-secondary institutions, public transit, etc.).*

*\*This resource outlines exemptions as described in the PHO Face Coverings Order. This Order takes precedence over the requirements outlined in the Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines as it is more restrictive. In the case of any variance between the PHO Order and the guidelines, the more restrictive measure should apply.*



(MASK EXEMPTION STRATEGIES CONT'D...)

- Explore a different type of face covering
  - *Can the person wear a **different type of mask**, or a face shield (without a mask)?*
- Examine options regarding limiting mask use to certain activities
  - *If the issue relates to having to wear a mask all day, can the person wear a mask during face-to-face classroom activities and hallway transitions but be able to take the mask off while working alone at their desk/workstation?*
  - *Can they use existing opportunities to remove masks more often, like spending breaks outdoors when the weather allows?*
- Explore opportunities to reinforce and enhance other safety measures
  - *For example, is the person willing to increase physical distance from others, provided that doing so does not result in them being isolated or excluded (e.g., being removed from a classroom, not being included in certain activities, working behind a barrier unless requested by the individual/family, etc.)?*
    - *The person must still follow all other required safety measures while at school (e.g., daily health checks, frequent hand hygiene, respecting others personal space, spreading out during activities, etc.).*
  - *Consider inclusive ways to create more space between everyone and adapt activities to minimize close, prolonged contact.*
  - *Discuss how the school is fostering a supportive school environment, recognizing the pandemic has impacted everyone differently. Share trauma-informed practices in place, including respecting the personal experiences and practices of others (e.g., being considerate of personal space, supporting others wearing masks, etc.).*



DAILY  
HEALTH CHECK



FREQUENT HAND  
WASHING/SANITIZING



SPREAD OUT



FACE  
COVERINGS



Alternative arrangements for students with mask exemptions should be communicated to staff (including itinerant staff and Teachers on Call) as necessary to avoid stigmatizing students.

For more information on how schools can support students and staff in practicing personal preventive measures, see the *Supportive School Environments* section of the [Guidelines](#) on page. 7.

