

Dear employer,

In light current universal masking recommendations, and inquiries from concerned patients and community leaders regarding universal masking, I have evaluated the current available evidence. To date, the current evidence for masking during COVID 19 outweighs any theoretical risks. As such, I fully advocate for universal masking, in addition to maintaining a 2m physical distance at all times and diligent frequent hand washing (or the use of an alcohol based hand sanitizer).

However, there are exceptional circumstances which do warrant consideration of a mask exemption.

- {Patient} has stated one of the below points apply to them***
 - 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 PTSD who are triggered by a face covering
 - extreme agoraphobia/asphyxia phobia (which is longstanding predating COVID 19)
 - people with cognitive impairment, intellectual deficiency or autism spectrum disorder for who wearing a face covering will cause severe distress or disorganization
 - people unable to apply or remove a face covering without help
 - people with accommodations under the Ontario Human Rights Code or the Accessibility for Ontarians with a Disabilities Act (that would pertain to wearing a face covering i.e. immobilization in a wheelchair would not qualify)
- No obvious exceptional circumstances***
 - Asthma and COPD (including chronic bronchitis and emphysema), discomfort, acne and need for oxygen therapy **are NOT contraindications** to mask wearing. Patients wearing oxygen can wear a mask over top of their nasal cannula. It does not impair their ability to continue to wear their oxygen, nor lower their oxygen levels.

I strongly advise people who are unable to wear a face covering to avoid all indoor public spaces.

If you choose to not wear a face covering and do not qualify for an exemption, we recommend you:

- try different mask formats and materials, to find one you feel is more tolerable
- try using the mask for short periods of time around home, slowly increasing the duration of wear at home until you can tolerate its use
- see a counsellor for support, tips, advice, desensitization, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Face Masks and the Feelings of Anxiety or Difficulty Breathing with a Face mask

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

- try different mask formats and materials to find one you feel is more tolerable
- try using the mask for short periods of time around home, slowly increasing the duration of wear at home until you can tolerate its use
- call and make an appointment with your physician or a counsellor who is experienced in working with patients with phobias and anxiety
- see any counsellor for support, tips, advice, desensitization, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
- avoid public indoor spaces and any circumstances in which physical distancing is not possible.

Research and evidence relating to the transmission and management of COVID19 continues to evolve. As guidelines from reputable health authorities, public health departments and professional societies are published, so too may my recommendations.

****Thank you for your understanding, your patience and your compassion****

Signed,

Date: _____

{Doctor name}

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