



# COVID-19

## Planning resource: *mask exemptions*



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



- The Provincial Health Officer's updated [Workplace Safety Order](#) (pg. 4) requires K-12 staff to wear masks in indoor common areas.
- The [Provincial COVID-19 Health & Safety Guidelines](#) (pg.28) require K-12 staff, students in Grades 4 - 12, and visitors to wear masks in schools and on school buses.
- Both the Order and the Guidelines allow exceptions for:
  - *A person who cannot tolerate wearing a mask for health or behavioural reasons*
  - *A person who is unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person*
- Staff, students and visitors are not required to provide a doctor's note if they cannot wear a mask.

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

In circumstances where a person cannot wear a mask due to health or behavioral reasons, schools are expected to work with these individuals (*and their parents/caregivers, if applicable*) to explore other measures to ensure their safety and the safety of others. Alternative measures must not be punitive or stigmatizing in nature, and students must not be prevented 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 or sneezing.*
  - *Masks provide protection to the person wearing them **and to those around them.***
  - *Generally, school-age children can safely wear masks.*
  - *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 the requirements in other indoor public spaces (e.g. shopping malls, grocery stores, recreation centres, public transit, etc).*
- Explore a different type of face covering
  - *Can the person wear a **different type of mask**, or a face shield?*
- 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?*



(MASK EXEMPTION STRATEGIES CONT'D)

- 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.)*
    - *At a minimum, the person should be reminded that they must still follow all other required safety measures while at school (e.g. physical distancing, daily health checks, frequent hand hygiene, etc.)*
  - *Consider inclusive ways to create more space, and reduce the number of close interactions, between everyone*
    - *Maximize space between all desks/workstations and avoid face-to-face seating configurations where possible*
    - *Utilize consistent seating arrangements*
    - *Minimize group activities and avoid activities that require close face-to-face contact*



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 pg. 8.

