

BY E-MAIL

Québec City, July 23, 2020

TO THE DIRECTORS OF PUBLIC HEALTH OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF THE
HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES NETWORK

Madam,
Sir,

The obligation to wear a mask or face covering in public spaces went into effect in Québec on July 18, 2020, and this for persons aged 12 years and older. The use of masks or face coverings is an additional strategy against COVID-19. It does not replace the measures of physical distancing and hand hygiene, which remain essential.

Pursuant to the announcement of the obligation to wear a mask or face covering in public, several questions have been raised concerning criteria for exemption for medical reasons. The present correspondence reflects the position of the provincial director of Public Health on the conditions for which an exemption from the obligation to wear a face covering may be granted.

Keep in mind that the general medical position is to systematically recommend the use of masks in public spaces. The medical conditions that justify an exemption to the rule remain the exception. For that purpose, below are examples of situations in which individuals may be exempted from wearing a mask or face covering due to a specific medical condition:

- individuals unable to put on or remove a mask by themselves due to a physical disability;
- individuals with a facial deformation;
- individuals who, due to a cognitive disorder, intellectual impairment, autism spectrum disorder, substance-abuse problem or acute psychological disorder, are unable to understand the obligation or for whom use of a mask or face covering causes disorganization or significant distress;

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- individuals with a severe skin condition on the face or ears which is significantly aggravated by use of a mask or face covering;
- individuals whose attending physician has concluded that the risks associated with use of a mask or face covering are greater than the individual and collective benefits of that measure. This category primarily covers individuals for whom use of a mask has been deemed harmful or dangerous by the attending physician due to a rare condition not included in the above examples. Discomfort cannot be considered a medical reason that justifies exemption.

It is recommended that individuals exempted from wearing a mask avoid frequenting indoor public spaces.

Further, we wish to reiterate that individuals with a chronic condition, including cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases, are among those for whom the benefits of wearing a mask or face covering are the greatest. For that reason, it is not recommended to grant an exemption from use of masks or face coverings to such persons in the absence of another condition that would justify doing so. It is also recommended that such individuals opt for procedural masks (medical masks) rather than face coverings whenever possible.

For individuals not granted an exemption and who are reluctant to wear a mask or face covering, the following recommendations can apply:

- avoid frequenting indoor public spaces without a mask or face covering;
- try several types of masks or face coverings to find one that suits you;
- wear the mask for brief periods while engaging in another activity in order to adapt gradually to use of a mask or face covering.

Yours truly,

Horacio Arruda, M.D., FRCPC
Provincial Director of Public Health and Assistant Deputy Minister

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