

## Patient Refusal to Wear Face Coverings during COVID-19: Guidance for Community Physicians and Teams

### Overview

This guidance has been developed to support community physicians and their teams in reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 among patients and staff related to patient refusal to wear face coverings in clinic settings.

### Guidance

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta ([CPSA](#)) has provided the following summarized guidance when patients refuse to wear face coverings in clinics:

1. Physicians have a responsibility to fully explain why a mask is required and to determine whether or not other options are possible under the clinical circumstances.
2. It is reasonable to reschedule routine care for:
  - a. Confirmed cases of COVID-19 (10-day isolation)
  - b. Individuals exhibiting COVID-like symptoms not related to pre-existing condition (10-day isolation)
  - c. Individuals returning to Alberta after international travel (14-day isolation)
  - d. Close contacts of confirmed cases of COVID-19 (14-day isolation)
3. Recommend virtual care for all patients who require routine care and do not want to wear a face covering.
4. Symptomatic or asymptomatic patients who are in need of urgent care and do not wear a face covering are able to be seen if proper social distancing practices and Infection and Control Protocols ([ICP](#)) are in place, most notably:
  - a. Take patient into isolation room
  - b. [Proper PPE](#) must be worn by the healthcare provider

Furthermore, AHS has suggested the following if patients refuse to wear face coverings:

1. Ask the patient to use hand sanitizer to disinfect their hands before they are moved to an isolation room.
2. Ask patient if donning a face shield would be helpful, depending on the circumstance as to why the patient refuses a face mask. This is optional and clinic PPE supplies should be considered.

### Please Note

- It is not possible to create blanket policies that exclude patients from receiving in-person care for failing to wear a mask, as each patient encounter is unique.
- If you feel a patient is unreasonably jeopardizing the safety of your staff or other patients, consult with the Canadian Medical Protective Association ([CMPA](#)) for a medical-legal opinion on a clinic's rights and obligations on patient masking and refusal of care. Email: [inquiries@cmpa.org](mailto:inquiries@cmpa.org) or Telephone: 1-800-267-6522.
- Albertans are encouraged to become familiar with all applicable laws and guidelines regarding masking based on their location and setting. These include the [Chief Medical Officer of Health orders](#), applicable municipal bylaws and additional guidance developed by employers and business owners.

- Albertans may be concerned about their ability to wear a mask based on pre-existing medical conditions. A person's clinician would be best positioned to do an assessment regarding a medical reason making them unable to wear a mask. This may include the provision of an exemption to masking requirements if needed and appropriate. There is more information from the AHS COVID-19 Scientific Advisory Group on the [Evidence of Harm from Mask Use for Specific Populations](#).

### More Information:

**Email:** [phc@ahs.ca](mailto:phc@ahs.ca)

**Information for community physicians on COVID-19:** [www.ahs.ca/covidphc](http://www.ahs.ca/covidphc)