

What a Mask Exemption/Exclusion Letter Is, and Isn't



Does a letter allow me to go anywhere without a mask?

No. All people are subject to the mandate for use of masks indoors, and outdoors where appropriate social distancing cannot be maintained. If a person with a disability cannot wear a mask, face shield or face covering, a place providing public services will need to work with that person to seek a reasonable modification to access their services. Examples would be a store could provide curbside pick-up, a restaurant could provide delivery or a doctor's office could provide appointments by phone or video when clinically appropriate.

Does this exemption allow me to work without a mask?

No. Except in situations where employees are at or in a location where they are not interacting with the public and six (6) feet or more of distance can be maintained between other people, employees must comply with the mask requirement. If an employee cannot wear a mask, face shield or face covering because of a disability, the employer must work with the employee to determine whether a reasonable accommodation can be provided. An employer should work with their human resources department or speak to their legal counsel to determine their legal options for addressing this issue. Employers may also reach out to the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) for technical assistance.

What are the conditions which would be considered for an exemption to the use of a face mask, covering?

Examples of a person with a disability who might not be able to wear a face mask

- Individuals with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or other respiratory disabilities may not be able to wear a face mask because of a feeling that it is more difficult to breathe through a mask. People with respiratory disabilities should consult their own medical professional for advice about using face masks.
- People with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), severe anxiety, or claustrophobia (an abnormal fear of being in enclosed or narrow places), may feel afraid or terrified when wearing a face mask. These individuals may not be able to stay calm or function when wearing a face mask.
- Some people with autism are sensitive to touch and texture. Covering the nose and mouth with fabric can cause sensory overload, feelings of panic, and extreme anxiety.
- A person who has cerebral palsy may have difficulty moving the small muscles in the hands, wrists, or fingers. Due to their limited mobility, they may not be able to tie the strings or put the

elastic loops of a face mask over the ears. This means that the individual may not be able to put on or remove a face mask without assistance.

- A person who uses mouth control devices such as a sip and puff to operate a wheelchair or assistive technology, or uses their mouth or tongue to use assistive ventilators will be unable to wear a mask

What can I do to better tolerate wearing a mask?

Masks can feel hard to breathe in or trigger emotional responses in many people, but with breathing and relaxation exercises, therapy to address past traumas, and safe, intermittent breaks from the use of the mask many people learn to tolerate wearing a mask when in public. Please talk to your doctor or integrated behavioral health specialist about ways to cope with masking.

What can I do instead of wearing a face mask?

Face shields are a clear plastic face covering which applies no pressure to the face or mouth which could influence breathing. Scarves and bandanas often can be helpful if a mask is difficult to use for you.