

FACE MASKS & ASTHMA: TIPS FOR PROVIDERS



Wearing a face mask is one of the few protections against the spread of COVID-19 in public places. The decision to give a face mask exemption should not be taken lightly and should be considered only in extreme circumstances.

A [joint statement](#) recommending that people with asthma and other severe lung diseases wear masks to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 was recently issued by the American College of Chest Physicians, American Thoracic Society, American Lung Association, and COPD Foundation.

Adults and children over age 2 with asthma who are not actively having an asthma attack should be able to breathe through cloth or standard medical masks without difficulty when sedentary or doing light physical activity. Masks must cover the nose and mouth, and tuck under the chin for a good fit. Face coverings should be discussed at all patient visits during the pandemic.

TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING MASK USE:

If patients are having trouble breathing with a mask on due to asthma symptoms, they need to make an appointment for help regaining control. During the pandemic, people who are actively having breathing problems should stay at home except to seek medical care.

- In some instances, physician reassurance regarding the safety of face coverings may be all that is needed.
- The gaps between mask fibers and around the edges of the mask allow for sufficient airflow so that there is no risk of buildup of carbon dioxide or lack of oxygen.
- Wearing a mask can also help block asthma triggers like common cold viruses, animal dander, pollen and cold air.
- Some mask types may work better than others so patients may need to try out different fabric types and styles to see what works best for them. For those with a latex allergy, encourage masks made with non-latex materials. Wearing any kind of mask is likely better than nothing!
- Face masks and face shields are not interchangeable, but face shields have been shown to reduce the amount of inhalation exposure to influenza respiratory virus.
- The use of N95 masks should be reserved for healthcare workers, except for select immunocompromised patients who should discuss this need with their physicians. Even for these patients, physical distancing should be the mainstay of self-protection.
- It may feel uncomfortable to wear a mask during vigorous physical activity for people with and without asthma. Exercising while wearing a mask should not cause an asthma flare in those with well-controlled asthma. The best option for exercising safely during the pandemic is to employ physical distancing outdoors. During extreme weather temperatures, some people with asthma will need to stay in climate-controlled areas as possible.

If an individual is given a mask exemption, they still may not be able to go places where masks are required.

VISIT [MICHIGAN.GOV / CORONAVIRUS](https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus) FOR MORE
WAYS TO STOP THE SPREAD OF COVID-19