

COVID-19 Guidance on Medical Exemptions (School Accommodation and Non-Medical Masks)

The benefits to children of ongoing access to education are clear, however efforts are required to ensure the return to school of Manitoba students is done safely, with all necessary COVID-19 precautions in place.

The majority of children and youth with underlying medical conditions should be able to safely attend school with enhanced safety measures (physical distancing, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting, wearing of non-medical masks) in place.

Remote learning for students for medical/ immune compromised reasons

As directed in COVID-19 K-12 School Settings Guidance and Protocols, division-level remote learning will be in place for students who are medically advised not to return to in-class learning due to the increased risk of severe illness due to COVID-19.

These situations should be rare and limited to children with compromised immune systems or other medical conditions that increase their risk of severe illness secondary to COVID-19. Children who are immunocompromised are likely already known to the school(s) and are likely not required to produce additional documentation.

Physicians who are asked to provide a medical note for school accommodations should request the parent/caregiver provide the appropriate form letter provided by the school division. (School divisions have been directed to develop a form letter, for signature by the health care provider).

Physicians should only complete and sign the form if:

- They have detailed knowledge of the medical condition(s) of the student or (if the immunocompromised individual is a member of the same household), of the family member; AND
- Based on their detailed knowledge of their patient (student or member of the same household), they recommend against a return to in-school learning due to the increased risk of severe illness due to COVID-19.

Due to privacy considerations, the medical note should not need to state the patient's specific diagnosis.

Non-Medical Masks

With respect to masks, public health has indicated a doctor's note is **not required** for students who are not able to wear a mask.

Please refer to https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/mask_guidance.pdf.

Specifically note the following guidance which has been provided to parents:

If a parent/guardian/caregiver is concerned about their child's ability to safely wear a mask, they should speak with their child's doctor. If the child is either unable to properly wear a mask or has a medical condition that does not allow them to wear a mask, the parent/guardian/caregiver

must provide written notification to the child's school outlining the child's limitations with wearing a mask. A note from a health-care provider is **not** required.

General Information

As public health measures and advice evolve and the wearing of a non-medical masks becomes a requirement in certain settings/circumstances, it is expected that requests for medical exemptions will also increase. COVID-19 is a new disease. Currently there exist limited data and information about the impact of underlying medical conditions and whether they increase the risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Expert groups have provided some information as risks to those with health conditions, and specifically in children. (Note resources 1 and 2 below).

Providers should also consider, and discuss with parents, the unintended consequences associated with not attending school. The benefits of attending school go beyond academic achievement - children and youth rely on schools for physical and mental health services, nutritious food, safety, security and support.

Additional Resources:

1. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fneed-extra-precautions%2Fgroups-at-higher-risk.html
2. <https://www.sickkids.ca/PDFs/About-SickKids/81407-COVID19-Recommendations-for-School-Reopening-SickKids.pdf>

Members of the public should be provided with information on the appropriate type, use and care for non-medical face masks. Information is available by referring to: <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/files/non-medical-mask-poster.pdf> and <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/about-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html>