

Thank you for your letter to Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health. Alberta Health is pleased to provide the following information;

Masks have been deemed effective in studies on suppressing transmission of other respiratory viruses. ([Jefferson et al.](#), [Suess et al.](#), Cowling et al., [Stockwell et al.](#), [Dharmadhikari et al.](#)) At this time, there is a sufficient evidence base that masking is a helpful intervention in conjunction with other public health measures to prevent transmission of COVID-19 when used in crowded indoor environments or in public spaces, where consistent distancing is not possible. Masks serve as a barrier, containing the infected wearer's respiratory droplets from onward transmission.

- An American [study](#) published in June, looked at 15 states and the District of Columbia before and after their mask mandates, found that masks reduced daily growth rate of new Covid-19 cases, particularly over time. Studies have also found that death rates have declined in [jurisdictions](#) that have adopted widespread public mask usage early in the outbreak.
- Mandatory masking in Jena, Germany, reduced the daily growth rate of COVID-19 by 40% in comparison to other German cities without masking orders. ([Mitze et al.](#))
- A study from Beijing, China, notes that when masks were worn prior to the development of symptoms, there was a 79% reduction in transmission. ([Wang et al.](#))
- Examples of settings where medical or non-medical masks should be used are available in the [WHO reports](#).

Chief medical Officer of Health Order [42-2020](#) outlines that the masking mandate does not apply to those who are engaging in physical exercise. Similarly, the [Guidance for Sports, Physical Activity and Recreation](#) does not require people to wear masks while playing sports/engaged in intense physical activity. This is for two reasons:

- it may be difficult to keep them in place, and
- because there is some evidence to suggest that sweat can make the mask become wet more quickly, making it difficult to breath comfortably and less effective.

Masks are effective when used properly. Any type of facial covering and material can be effective as long as it fits well, stays dry, and covers the nose and mouth.

There is conflicting guidance from major health bodies around the use of masks while engaged in physical activity/sports.

- **WHO [advises against wearing masks](#)** while exercising/playing sports due to breathability issues and identifies physical distancing of at least 1m from others as the preventive measure to limit the spread of COVID-19.
  - Sweat can make the mask become wet more quickly which makes it difficult to breathe and promotes the growth of microorganisms. The WHO identifies physical distancing from others of at least 1 meter as the important preventive measure during exercise.
- **CDC [promotes the use of masks even](#)** in places like gyms, to help block the transmission of COVID-19 through breathing. They also note that if people cannot wear a mask during high-intensity activities, they should do the activity where there is adequate ventilation and air exchange – like outside-and/or maintain physical distancing.

Thank you for taking the time to write and for your feedback. We will consider it, as well as other learnings to ensure our guidance is reasonable and appropriate.

Sincerely,

Alberta Health