



## Support for People Who Have a Hard Time Wearing Face Coverings (Masks)

April 6, 2021

[Read the State of California's mask guidance.](#)

### What makes it hard for some people with developmental disabilities, autism, and sensory or other challenges to wear face coverings (masks)?<sup>1</sup>

- Some people are advised by a medical professional not to wear face coverings. For example, there are people who have trouble breathing through a face covering or cannot remove a face covering without assistance. For these people, a face covering could be dangerous.
- Anyone who is deaf and uses facial and mouth movements as part of communication, does not need to wear a face covering. These individuals could consider wearing a clear mask or a cloth mask with a clear plastic panel.
- Having fabric placed over the mouth and nose can be a scary experience, especially if someone does not understand why it is necessary. It can cause sensory overload, feelings of panic, and extreme anxiety. [Get some tips for reducing mask anxiety.](#)
- Face coverings can be uncomfortable for anyone who has trouble tolerating different textures of fabric and/or fabric and bands around their face, such as individuals on the autism spectrum or others who have sensory processing challenges. [Here are ideas for finding the right mask and making face coverings more comfortable.](#) The guidance is helpful regardless of the reason for the mask sensitivity.
- Face coverings can feel stigmatizing. Family and friends can reduce the stigma by consistently wearing their own face coverings when outside the home.

[Learn more about helping people with developmental disabilities get used to wearing face coverings.](#)  
[Also, here are some specific ideas for helping people with autism wear masks.](#)

### What are the alternatives for people who cannot wear a face mask?

- A bandana or scarf may be more comfortable and easier to keep in place, but it should be folded so that at least two layers of fabric cover the nose and mouth.
- A plastic face shield can provide some protection from infectious particles. However, it is not a substitute for a face covering, since it doesn't contain the respiratory droplets of the person

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<sup>1</sup> Partially adapted from the *About Masks Fact Sheet* from the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities



wearing it. If someone chooses to wear a face shield, it should extend below the chin and cover the sides of the face.

- Everyone should practice physical distancing of at least 6 feet and frequent handwashing.
- Participating in activities outdoors, when possible, also reduces the risk of transmitting the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

### **When is someone with a disability exempt from wearing a face covering at a place of business, such as a store or at work?**

- **If an individual has a disability and is advised by a medical professional not to wear a face covering, they should inform the employees of the store or other business when asked.**
- An employee should not be required to wear a face covering if (1) a medical professional has provided a written exemption to the face covering requirement, based on a medical condition, other health concern, or disability; or (2) if wearing a face covering while working would create a risk to the person related to their work as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.
- **An employee who does not need to wear a face covering due to a medical condition must wear a non-restrictive alternative if their job involves regular contact with others, as long as their condition permits it. One option is a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge.**
- **[Learn more about the rights of a person with a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\).](#)**

### **Resources**

[Trouble Wearing Masks: Tips to Help Kids at School](#)

[Sensory Friendly Masks](#)

CDC's [Considerations for Wearing Masks](#)

[Helping Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Become Comfortable with Face Masks](#)

[COVID-19 Resources](#) from Alameda County's Developmental Disabilities Council

[COVID-19: Face Masks and People with Disabilities](#) from the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund

[Americans with Disabilities Act and Face Mask Policies](#)

[Helping Individuals with Autism Wear Face Masks](#)

[How to Overcome Mask Anxiety](#)