

# Wearing a mask: supporting people with a disability

## Who is this information for?

People with a disability and their supports, including service providers, living and working within metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

## Why does a person with a disability need to wear a mask?

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities have higher levels of health needs compared to the general population. This often leads to people with a disability being at an increased health risk of contracting COVID-19.

## Does a person with a disability have to wear a mask?

Like all Victorians, people with a disability are required to wear a face mask. However, the Victorian Government has made exceptions when there is a risk to a person's health and safety, including; medical conditions, communication needs, and other individual risk factors.

For example; a person with autism may not be able to tolerate wearing a mask, as the mask causes distress.

For example; a person with an intellectual disability may not understand the need to wear a mask and therefore refuse to wear a mask.

For example; a person who produces excessive saliva or nasal mucus, may find wearing a mask too uncomfortable to comply.

## When does a person with a disability need to wear a mask?

As recommended by the Victorian Government, a person is required to wear a mask when leaving their home for one of the four reasons; shopping for food and supplies, care and caregiving, exercise, and study and work, if you can't do it from home. People living within disability residential facilities are not expected to wear a mask when they are inside their home.

## Does a person supporting a person with a disability need to wear a mask?

The Victorian Government advises any individual supporting a person with a disability, should always wear a mask, unless it is unsafe to do so. Disability service providers may have their own policies relating to PPE and supporting consumers, employees should seek clarification with their own employers. The Commonwealth Department of Health provides a [guide to personal protective equipment for disability care providers](#).

For example; a person with autism may not tolerate their support person wearing a mask and may try to physically remove it from their support person's face. This poses a physical safety risk to the support person, so consideration should be made how to most appropriately support the person with autism.

## **Things you can do to support a person with a disability to wear a mask:**

Educating a person with a disability key can be done in many ways. Keep the information simple such as the use of pictures and suit it to the person's individual learning needs. This may need to be discussed or presented several times. There are several ways to support a person to wear a mask including, but not limited to

- [social stories](#) on how to wear a mask and why
- pictures and posters
- using cloth masks that are customised to something the person likes e.g. colours, patterns
- modelling how to put on and take off a mask
- desensitising e.g. start with the person to just hold a mask

Refer to disability organisations websites and the Victorian Government website for further resources.

## **What if the person with a disability is not able to wear a mask?**

It is important to remind the person of maintaining a social distance (1.5m) wherever possible, practice good personal hygiene including handwashing or using hand sanitiser and if they can, encourage the person to tell you if they are feeling unwell. If they are not able to follow these guidelines, support them in doing so.

## **Where can I find out more?**

[Wearing a mask social story – pictures](#)

[Wearing a mask social story – easy read and symbols](#)

[Department of Health and Human Services – promotional materials](#)

[World Health Organisation – how to use masks](#)

[Department of Social Services – wearing a mask \(easy read\)](#)

Disability Information Helpline on 1800 643 787

COVID-19 Health Professionals Disability Advisory Service 1800 131 330

Centre for Development Disability Health 03 9792 8042

Note: If you regularly see a health professional, we encourage you to continue your care and support during COVID-19.