



August 2020

ADDRESSING PATIENT CONCERNS REGARDING THE CANADIAN THORACIC SOCIETY POSITION STATEMENT ON USE OF FACE MASKS BY THE PUBLIC DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Balancing concerns for both personal and public safety has been the preoccupation of the Canadian Thoracic Society (CTS) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 is a new virus that is affecting people all over the world. On a daily basis, we are learning more about the virus, its transmission, its effects, and treatment options. In respect of the fact that currently there is no vaccine for the virus, and that consistently effective treatments remain elusive, strong public health measures remain our best defence both individually and as a society. When physical distancing cannot be maintained, the use of face masks is an important part of the public health strategy.

As respiratory health experts, we have a strong understanding of what our patients experience when living with an underlying lung condition, and the impact that this can have on people's lives. Our recommendations for the treatment of lung diseases are guided by published scientific studies, in order to help our patients to live longer and to have the best possible outcomes. Similarly, in developing our position statement on the use of face masks, we reviewed the available scientific studies on the impact of the use of face masks on COVID-19 transmission and balanced this information against our knowledge of the physical and functional effects of wearing a face mask, particularly for people with underlying lung conditions. We used all of this information to reach the most informed recommendations on this topic during the pandemic, while also considering the fact that patients with severe lung disease are the ones who are most susceptible to severe COVID-19 infection and therefore the ones for whom broad use of face masks is most important. Accordingly, our advice to all citizens, including patients with underlying lung disease, is to wear a face mask in situations where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

We recognize that wearing a face mask may not be possible for some people, but their lung disease should rarely be the cause of this. Despite your best efforts, if you cannot wear a face mask consider using alternatives to face masks as recommended by the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) or the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (such as face shields) or avoiding circumstances where physical distancing is not possible.

Ultimately, individuals are free to make decisions for themselves, as long as they maintain compliance with rules set by their local public health units.

The CTS remains very concerned about the spread of COVID-19, particularly to people with underlying lung conditions, and we will continue to review the scientific evidence on a regular basis and update our recommendations as needed.