

## FAQs: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

**Before you decide on what personal protective equipment (PPE) to wear, complete a point of care risk assessment and the COVID-19 screen with the patient. Use your professional judgement about the use of PPE. If you don't have the appropriate PPE for a patient, adapt your assessment or treatment or postpone the in-person appointment. Always consider the option of providing services through virtual care.**

### Children and Personal Protective Equipment

- 1) Question: Do all children have to wear a mask? What about articulation, phonology, and apraxia therapy where their mouths must be visible?

Answer: The Ministry of Health does not expect infants, toddlers or pre-school children to wear a mask when receiving audiology or speech-language pathology services. You, as the service provider, are required to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) if you are going to be closer than 6 feet to the child. You can wear a clear mask or a face shield and must use good hand hygiene, see [Pandemic Practice Advisory # 4](#) for details.

A parent or guardian accompanying a child to an appointment must wear a mask or face covering.

- 2) Question: At what age should children start wearing masks?

Answer: The Ministry of Health recommends school-age children wear a mask if tolerated. The child should remove the mask if you need to see the child's mouth in the course of assessment or therapy. You are required to wear PPE when you are closer than 6 feet and even if the child can tolerate wearing a mask.

- 3) Question: Realistically, many children are not going to keep masks on, especially if they have a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder, autism, etcetera.

Answer: The Ministry of Health recommends that masks be worn by school-age children only if tolerated. If a child cannot tolerate a mask, they should not be made to wear one during audiology and speech language pathology sessions. However, you

as the health professional must wear PPE, including a mask or face shield and use good hand hygiene see [Pandemic Practice Advisory # 4](#) for details.

## **Audiologists and SLPs PPE**

- 4) Question: I have made my own material masks which I will wash on a daily basis. Is it alright to use home-made masks?

Can I use my own face shield which a friend has fabricated following the recommendations from Public Health Ontario?

Answer: The Ministry of Health does not advise health professionals to wear 'home made' PPE when providing in-person health care services. Instead, use Health Canada authorized PPE. Consult the Ministry's [Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](#) for information where to source appropriate PPE.

- 5) Question: If the patient is behind a plexiglass barrier, do I need to wear a mask?

Answer: No, you do not need to wear a mask if you can maintain 6 feet distance between you and your patient at all times:

Plexiglass barriers are an additional method to prevent COVID-19 transmission. However, you must follow physical distancing principles ([Pandemic Practice Advisory #5 Physical Distance](#)).

- I. If the patient has a negative result on the COVID-19 screen, and you can maintain a 6 feet distance from the patient who is sitting behind a plexiglass screen for audiology or speech-language pathology services, you don't need to wear a mask.
- II. If the patient has problems staying seated at a table and is likely to move closer to you than 6 feet, then yes, you still need to wear a mask or a face shield.

6) Question: Do I need to install plexiglass for administrative/office staff who conduct in-person screening?

Answer: Yes, if they are conducting a COVID-19 screen in-person, the Ministry of Health is recommending that the screener be masked and behind a plexiglass screen.

7) Question: If we wear face shields, do we need to wear a mask as well?

Answer: It depends:

- Yes, if you are providing care to a patient with COVID-19 you are required to wear a surgical/procedural mask, clear mask and eye protection (face shield or goggles).
- No, you don't need to wear a mask if the patient has a negative result on the COVID-19 screen. You can wear a face shield as long as it complies with Public Health Ontario's recommendations:

"Face shields come in various forms, but all provide a clear plastic barrier that covers the face. For optimal protection, the shield should extend below the chin anteriorly, to the ears laterally, and there should be no exposed gap between the forehead and the shield's headpiece. Ensuring that no part of the face is exposed is absolutely essential."

8) Question: When should we wear gloves? I have heard contrary advice?

Answer: Hand hygiene is imperative and must take place before and after each patient visit.

- You don't have to wear gloves with patients who screen negative on the COVID-19 screen.
- Public Health Ontario recommends the use of gloves when providing care to:
  - patients who have a diagnosis of COVID-19
  - patients who fail the COVID-19 screen and are awaiting COVID-19 test results

- CASLPO recommends the use of gloves when you have to touch a patient's mouth or oral cavity.

#### 9) Question: If someone refuses to wear a mask, can we defer the in-person service?

Answer: It depends.

Patients and essential visitors are required to wear masks or face coverings unless they are exempt. You will need to inform patients ahead of the appointment about your workplace masking requirements, including policies you have for patients and essential visitors. You are required to post the patient and visitor masking requirements in a visible location in your office and on your website.

According to [Public Health Ontario](#), patients and essential visitors who are exempt from masking requirements are:

- People who suffer from illness or disabilities that make it difficult to wear a mask
- Those who have difficulty breathing and/or
- Children under the age of 2

According to the Ministry of Health ([pandemic practice advisory #4](#)), patients who are exempt from masking requirements are:

- Pre-school children receiving audiology and S-LP assessment and treatment
- School age children receiving audiology and S-LP assessment and treatment who cannot tolerate wearing a mask

For patients and essential visitors who are exempt, you must determine the appropriate PPE to wear based on your point of care risk assessment and COVID-19 screening results. You must implement all safety measures to reduce transmission of COVID-19.

For individuals who refuse to wear a mask or face covering, explore the reasons why and discuss alternatives. Alternatives may include virtual services, providing in-person patient care while maintaining the 2-meter distance, providing in-person patient care while wearing the appropriate PPE if you are with or within a 2-meter distance, or deferring the in-person appointment.

If you are deferring a patient who still requires services, follow up with the patient in a reasonable time frame to see if there any changes in their status and whether they are able to tolerate wearing a mask.

For further resources, please refer to the [Pandemic Practice Advisories](#), and Health Canada information on the [Dos and Don'ts on wearing a mask](#).