



PANDEMIC MITIGATION COLLABORATIVE

PMC19.com/exemption.pdf

August 5, 2024

RE: MASK BAN EXEMPTION FOR HEALTH, RELIGION, AND CELEBRATION

To Whom It May Concern:

I have provided this letter of support for anyone wearing a mask in a region that has enacted a general mask ban to document their eligibility for an exemption. Most legislation includes (a) medical, public health, and science exemptions, (b) religious exemptions, and (c) celebratory exemptions. A printed or e-copy version of this letter provides the individual with all three exemptions.

Medical Science Exemption: As the Director of a health science PhD program who has completed a medical research degree (MSCR), serves in many national and international health leadership positions, has published >100 peer-reviewed scientific articles, and has reviewed >\$100 million in medical research grant applications, I am fully aware of the science on masking. Through multiple mechanisms, a well-fitting high-quality mask greatly protects an individual from the risk of airborne illnesses, including the spread of COVID-19, which often spreads from asymptomatic or paucisymptomatic individuals. I mask in all public indoor spaces, which has protected me well from illness for 4.5 years and counting. In my role at the Director of the Pandemic Mitigation Collaborative, I closely monitor national wastewater surveillance data on viral transmission, and our models estimate that the U.S. is currently experiencing 1 million SARS-CoV-2 infections per day, with transmission the remainder of 2024 likely comparable to much worse. As repeat infections increase the cumulative risk of experiencing serious outcomes, including Long COVID, masking is a wise choice for anyone who cares about their own health or that of their family or community. Masking is particularly important for individuals with known medical vulnerabilities that probabilistically increase the likelihood of a serious outcome from the acute infection. In sum, all people have the civil right to mask given the ongoing state of COVID-19.

Religious Exemption: When I heard of this legislation earlier this year, I became ordained as a minister through the Universal Life Church and encourage all individuals who identify with a religion, faith, spiritual perspective, or world view to mask to protect themselves and their communities from COVID-19. An excerpt of the ULC Mission follows: "The ULC champions religious freedom, social justice, and spiritual expression.... Furthermore, we've made it our mission to spread these freedoms far and wide, empowering people of all walks of life to take up the work of ministry on their own terms, and in ways that make the most sense for them.... the ULC welcomes you just as you are, whoever you are and hopes to empower you to explore your faith however you see fit." All individuals who identify as such are empowered with a religious exemption.

Celebratory Purposes Exemption: As a resident of New Orleans, we are known for Mardi Gras, parades, the French Quarter, festivals, events, and revelry. Such events often involve masks, and in 2020, our cultural behavior evolved to include medical masks and respirators to protect ourselves from COVID-19 during social interactions. Any social interaction that is safer during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic due to mask wearing should be deemed celebratory, and the mask a "celebratory mask." If law enforcement perceives a mask as insufficiently celebratory, I will send the individual a 3M Aura safely branded with a fleur-de-lis dry transfer sticker, blessed over a dish of red beans and rice. In the meantime, celebrate using the current mask.

Sincerely,

Michael Hoerger, PhD, MSCR, MBA
Director, Pandemic Mitigation Collaborative