

QUINNS MINDARIE SUPER CLINIC MASK POLICY

During periods of peak respiratory illnesses, wearing a mask may be required. This may be mandated at government level. Some people may be eligible for a mask exemption on medical grounds. Guidance around valid medical exemptions has been issued by state health departments.

Triage of people not wearing a mask

While we appreciate the request to not wear a mask in our practice, this has to be balanced by our overriding legal occupational health and safety obligations to our patients / staff / others who attend the practice; our obligations under the Medical Board Code of Conduct to keep our staff and patients safe, and to take action to protect against risks posed by patients to those at the practice. This includes people who are at ongoing risk of severe complications were they to acquire significant infective illnesses, including but not limited to Covid-19, and who may even be vaccinated but still are at risk because of their underlying health issues.

Transmission of respiratory illnesses (even if not Covid-19) also poses an operational risk to the practice, in addition to any inconvenience or risks this might pose to others attending the practice. Currently, symptomatic respiratory illnesses acquired by staff require all staff (and patients) to be tested for Covid-19, and to isolate while they wait for those tests to come back. This operational risk is significant, as it can result in the closure of practices, particularly for highly infective and transmissible illnesses. Closure of the practice (or even just downtime from several staff having to isolate) delays the provision of care to our patients, which is also a risk.

Where a patient has indicated that they are not able to wear a mask at the practice, we will conduct a risk assessment of your consultation needs balanced against the risk posed to our staff / patients and other attendees to the practice, and our legal obligations.

So that we can accommodate patients unable to wear a mask at the practice, and so as to also address the risk that unmasked patients pose to staff / other patients / other practice attendees, this will be our policy going forwards in such circumstances (emergencies excluded):

- If a consultation can be conducted by Tele-health, we will aim to facilitate this. Video consultation is preferred.
- If a consultation requires face to face attendance, then we require:
 - *The patient and any accompanying person not wearing a mask, to provide evidence of a negative COVID PCR swab result within the last 48 hours of any attendance, so as to reduce the risk to our staff, and other persons at the practice, of Covid-19 transmission.*

OR

- *The patient call reception on arrival and wait in their car until the time of their appointment. When the doctor is ready, they will call or come to the door to escort the patient directly to the consultation room. This will minimise the potential for spreading infection to unwell or vulnerable people in the clinic that may otherwise occur if the patient without a mask, was waiting inside the clinic.*

- We will adjust the consultations to minimise the risk of cross transmission to staff and other patients, which may mean that consultations are only offered at the beginning or end of consultation period, consultation times may be limited to less than 15 minutes and with available staff where the consultation does not pose a risk to them.
- We will need the patient to confirm that they have no respiratory symptoms (cough, runny nose, sore throat, difficulty breathing or fever) before attending. If patients have such symptoms, then a face-to-face consultation cannot proceed, except in the case of an emergency. A Telehealth appointment will be offered in the first instance.

Please understand that this risk management approach is based on the risks posed by persons attending the practice who are not able to wear a mask, not because of any underlying illness that the person might have. Our approach to minimise face to face contact between people unable to wear a mask and others at the practice remains the same. Our policy does not require a patient to disclose why they are unable to wear a mask, although we note that you may have chosen to declare this to us in any case. Our approach aligns with the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care's [COVID-19 infection prevention and control risk management](#), particularly transmission based precautions.

We would ask that all patients with a valid mask exemption respectfully adhere to our practice policy as above. Abusive or threatening behaviour towards our team is not appropriate.

If this arrangement is not acceptable to the person/s involved, they will need to find a practice that is able to accommodate their needs within their own risk assessments, policies and obligations.