



Navigating Mask Mandate, Handling Objections, and Medical Exemptions

Ins & Outs of the Mask Mandate

A [statewide mask mandate](#) is in effect for New Hampshire from November 20, 2020 - at minimum, January 15, 2021. The order requires individuals over the age of 5 to wear a mask or cloth face covering over their noses and mouths any time they are in public spaces, indoors or outdoors, where they are unable to consistently maintain a physical distance of at least six feet from others outside their own households. This order is for private or public property that is open or accessible to the general public. This includes lobbies, waiting areas, outside plazas or patios, restaurants, stores, streets, sidewalks, parks, beaches, elevators, restrooms, stairways, parking garages, and more. There are exemptions from the mandate, such as medical exemptions, when engaging in strenuous physical activity, those who are communicating with or have hearing impairments, children under 5 years old, and people performing for an audience. There are also exceptions for guests eating, drinking, or sitting at a table in a restaurant. The mandate also permits an employee to request an individual to temporarily remove their mask for IDing purposes.

Make It Visible

To prevent the possibility of an unpleasant interaction, make the mask requirement as visible as possible to customers. This means posting it on your website, hanging signage at your entrance, advising customers when they are making a reservation, and promoting your policy on social media. NH residents may already be aware of the mask mandate, but unaware of how it impacts their patronage at your establishment. Out of state guests may be unaware of the mandate. If customers are aware beforehand of what situations when entering your establishment mask wearing is required, there is less likelihood of a complaint once they arrive. After arrival, make sure

your staff reminds customers of the need to wear masks when they are getting up from their table, going to the restroom, or entering your lobby. To find a printable poster that covers state signage requirements, please [click here](#).

Train Staff on Your Expectations

Communicating with your employees what the safety protocols you are putting into place, including requiring customers to wear masks in particular instances and how you would like them to explain those protocols to customers, is crucial. Employees should be coached on exactly how you would like them to react if a customer is not following the policy or claims exemption from the mandate. Whether it be a polite reminder or requesting a manager's assistance, staff should be comfortable in what is expected of them when handling these interactions with customers. Employees should also be made aware of the exceptions to the mask mandate which include children under the age of 5, those with medical issues that prohibit them from wearing a mask, and that masks may be asked to be temporarily removed when IDing a customer is legally required and necessary.

Handling a Customer Who Refuses to Comply

If a customer refuses to comply with your policy after a staff member has politely requested them to, a manager should be involved. Managers should go into these situations delicately, but aware of what needs to be done if a customer becomes belligerent. ServSafe offers free online training, [Conflict De-escalation](#), which can assist in training staff on the proper handling of these situations. Some best practice techniques when managing this situation and the best steps for your manager to take are:

- Privately and politely inform the customer of the mask policy. If needed, explain the state mandate that requires these safety measures in your establishment.
- If available, offer to provide the customer with a mask.
- Offer reasonable accommodations for your services. For example, a restaurant may offer curbside pick-up to a customer who would like to dine with them, but will not wear a mask or to change a reservation to a later date.
- If a visitor still refuses, request that they leave until they can comply with the mask policy or until masks are no longer necessary.
- If a customer becomes belligerent or threatening, call security or local authorities immediately.

- Regardless of whether the customer chooses to leave or comply, the manager should document (objectively and in detail) the incident to keep in your records. Be sure to retain those reports in case they are later needed.

Medical Exemptions and Accommodations

Some customers may qualify for a medical exemption from the mask mandate. Although there are valid medical exemptions listed in the mask mandate, protests due to political beliefs or due to the customer's personal anti-mask stance are not permitted exceptions. A person may claim a medical exemption if they:

- Are deaf, hard of hearing, or communicating with an individual who has a hearing impairment.
- Have a disability, medical condition, or mental health condition that causes communication while wearing a mask difficult.
- Has difficulty breathing.
- Has a medical condition that prevents them from wearing a mask covering.

This situation still needs to be handled with the utmost care and consideration. When training your management team about how to respond to customers claiming a medical exemption, be sure they are aware that they are not to engage with the customer about their disability. This means not asking them to disclose their personal medical history or asking for proof of medical diagnosis. The mandate specifically states that an individual with a medical exemption is not required to provide documentation or proof of condition. If the individual produces a medical exemption card, be aware that the ADA is not issuing mask exception cards or posters. You can [click here](#) for more information.

Free Resources for Navigating the Mask Mandate

- [ServSafe Conflict De-Escalation Training](#)
- Mask Mandate Signage: Lodging | Food Service
- CDC Poster: [How to Safely Wear & Take Off a Mask](#)
- [NHLRA COVID-19 Guidance & Resource Hub](#)

Disclosure: These guidelines are based on best practices, state resources, and current guidance, and should be used in conjunction with any state or federally issued guidelines. This is meant for the purpose of assisting in the creation of an establishment's own COVID-19 response plan and is not a legal or state-issued document.

