

Questions and Answers about the Provincial Health Officer's March 23, 2020 Update for Regulated Health Professionals

The College of Opticians of British Columbia has compiled questions and answers about Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry's March 23, 2020 [update for regulated health professionals](#).

What does this update from the Provincial Health Officer mean for registrants of COBC?

- In a recent [letter to registrants](#), we advised that registrants limit all non-essential patient interactions until further notice
- The Provincial Health Officer's directions are consistent with this and should be acknowledged with the upmost vigilance.

In her update, Dr. Henry said: "All non-essential and elective services involving direct physical contact with patients and clients should be reduced to minimal levels, subject to allowable exceptions, until further notice." What is considered to be non-essential or elective care during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- COBC recognizes that our registrants have the training and expertise to use professional judgement in the provision of care to patients. Opticians have the ability to make decisions and provide care based on the unique needs of each patient. However, in light of the extraordinary situation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, COBC is providing some additional guidance.
- As stated previously, COBC strongly recommends that registrants cease delivery of non-essential or elective care during the special situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is care that is neither emergent nor urgent.
- In general, emergent care is defined as immediate management or treatment of potentially life-threatening conditions. This is not something that opticians manage in their regular practice environment.
- In general, essential (urgent) care is separate from emergency care and focuses on the management and treatment of conditions that require prompt attention. For opticians, this could include (but not be limited to)
 - Services that if not provided, would significantly impact a patient's ability to function due to reduced visual acuity. This could include such things as lost or broken glasses, low vision aids, and contact lens replacement services. Opticians should consider if patients would be restricted from driving, be able to prepare meals and care for themselves and others, and manage other basic tasks such as paying bills online if service is not provided.
 - Automated refractions only if necessary, for the reason noted above (ensure that patients meet the requirements noted in the [Opticians Regulations](#), and if not, refer to an authorized prescriber).
 - Adjustments to glasses where the patient is in pain or has lesions due to improperly fitting glasses.
 - Contact lens related complications such as pain, redness or suspected allergic reaction.
 - Safety glasses for those working in environments that require specific standards to meet safety guidelines.

- In general, non-essential care is considered non-urgent and for opticians could include (but not be limited to)
 - Patients who have glasses with a current prescription but are shopping for new ones.
 - First time contact lens fits for patients who have glasses.
 - Patients wanting an adjustment for a fitting issue that is not causing pain or lesions.

Dr. Henry said in making decisions regarding the reduction or elimination of non-essential and elective services, health professionals should be guided by their regulatory college and a series of principles, including “reciprocity”. What does reciprocity mean?

- Dr. Henry explained reciprocity by saying, “Certain persons or populations will be particularly burdened as a result of a reduction in non-essential services. As such, patients and clients should have the ability to have their health monitored and it be revaluated as required.”
- To follow this principle, COBC recommends that registrants develop a plan for patients who have contacted your office requesting care that you have determined to be non-essential due to the COVID-19 situation. This is so you can take action should their needs change and they require essential care.
- This plan may include giving them specific instructions to contact you should their condition change; providing ongoing follow up from your office to assess their condition; or directing them to an alternate source of care, such as another health care professional.

How should I screen my patients for COVID-19?

- Ask the patient if they are experiencing any [symptoms of COVID-19](#), as described by the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC), including cough, sneezing, fever, sore throat, and difficulty breathing.
- Ask about any recent [travel](#) outside of Canada.
- Ask about any contact with individuals who have a confirmed or presumptive diagnosis of COVID-19.
- Try to pre-screen patients by phone if possible.
- As suggested by BCCDC, individuals can use the [COVID-19 BC Support App and Self-Assessment Tool](#) to help determine if they need further assessment or testing for COVID-19

What are the implications of providing hands-on care?

- When direct physical contact is required for the care of patients with presumptive or confirmed COVID-19, health professionals must use infection control practices. See the BCCDC’s page on COVID-19 [Infection Control](#).
- If you are not able to ensure adequate infection control, do not provide care to the patient. Seek an alternate approach to meet their care needs (e.g. referral to another provider or facility).
- COBC’s [Standards of Practice, section 3.2](#) outline infection control best practices for opticians.

Where can I find more information on providing virtual care?

- The Office of Virtual Health and Digital Health Team at Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) has developed a [Virtual Health toolkit](#) for use during the COVID-19 pandemic. The toolkit

provides information on virtual care technology solutions, endorsed by the Ministry of Health and PHSA. COVID-19 resources on the BCCDC website also link to the toolkit.

- The Virtual Health toolkit includes email as a solution, and notes that Canadian privacy laws apply to email accounts based in Canada. BC's Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA) outlines rules applicable to private practice registrants about the collection, use, and disclosure of information. Ensure your virtual care solution is PIPA compliant.

This is a rapidly changing situation, so we ask that all registrants check the COBC website regularly for the most up to date information. We thank you for your attention to these communications and your continued professionalism in these extraordinary times. If you have questions or concerns, please contact COBC. While the office remains closed, all staff are working remotely and are here to support you. Please email us at reception@cobc.ca or leave a voice mail at 604-742-6472 and someone will get back to you as soon as possible.

The COBC Team