

Frequently Asked Questions

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PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT

Q: Can opticians remain open during the announced Toronto and Peel lock-down?

A: Health care practitioners, including opticians, can continue to operate. Continue to follow the Return to Practice Guidelines.

Q: Are we allowed to take the patient's temperature before providing care?

A: Opticians are required to screen all patients at time of booking and again before they enter the dispensary (Point of Care Risk Assessment), and should follow the latest [COVID-19 Patient Screening Guidance Document](#) published by the Ministry of Health, with necessary adaptations/modifications to the dispensary environment. Opticians may exercise professional judgment to determine if any additional screening methods should be used.

Q: Can we refuse services or deny a patient from entering the dispensary or trying on frames if they are showing symptoms or otherwise screen positive for COVID-19?

A: It is recommended that patients who screen positive for COVID-19 be asked to return when they are well.

In the event that a patient requires urgent care, service should only be refused after carefully considering whether there is a way to deliver the care in a way that is safe for both yourself and the patient. Consider remote practice when possible.

The Ministry of Health [Health Sector Restart Requirements](#) require health professionals to don full Personal Protective Equipment (surgical mask, isolation gown, gloves, eye protection, hand hygiene) for all interactions with or within 2 metres of a patient who screens positive for COVID-19.

If it is not possible to deliver care in line with these requirements, the optician should make efforts to refer the patient to another health professional who is able to assist.

Q: Can we keep the door to the dispensary locked or otherwise limit entry?

A: It is recommended that opticians limit the number of individuals in the dispensary to no more than is necessary in the circumstances. At a minimum, opticians must take reasonable and appropriate measures to ensure that there is sufficient space to follow physical distancing guidelines of at least 2 metres between persons not from the same household. This can be accomplished in a number of ways:

- Encouraging individuals to attend by appointment only and/or limiting the number of walk-ins
- Keeping the door locked or assigning a staff person or security guard to monitor entrances
- Asking patients to attend unaccompanied, unless they are a minor or otherwise require assistance

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- Placing signs in the dispensary that encourage physical distancing and provide instructions for doing so
- Spacing waiting room areas/chairs to ensure minimum 2 metre distance between patients or asking people to wait outside or in their vehicles
- Setting up visual cues such as floor markers that are at least 2 metres apart or arrows to indicate a directional flow through the facility

Q: I work together with an optometrist. Whose guidelines do I follow, the College of Opticians or the College of Optometrists?

A: As an optician you are required to comply with the Standards and Guidelines set by the College of Opticians. If you are working under the direction and/or delegation of an optometrist, you should ensure that you are also complying with your professional obligations as an optician.

Q: Do patients have to sign a COVID-19 transmission release of liability upon visiting the office?

A: Opticians must use professional judgment to decide what measures are necessary to protect themselves, their patients and their staff in the circumstances. Opticians who are employers have additional obligations under occupational health and safety legislation, and should seek legal advice on their responsibilities.

OPENING THE DISPENSARY

Q: Is it mandatory to get tested for COVID-19 before resuming practice?

A: No, under current practice directives and guidelines (as of June 2, 2020), there is no requirement for opticians to undergo testing for COVID-19 prior to returning to practice.

Under [Ministry of Health guidelines](#) issued on May 28, 2020, health care workers that are returning to work are advised to follow “**isolation and clearance with a non-test based approach**” unless they required hospitalization during the course of their illness, in which case a test based approach is preferred. The guidelines note that some health care workers may be directed by their employers to undergo testing before returning to work.

All opticians, regardless of whether they undergo testing, must follow the Return to Practice Guidelines and self-isolate for at least 14 days if they screen positive for COVID-19, which typically means where any of the following conditions are met:

- They test positive for COVID-19 or are awaiting test results
- They experience symptoms of COVID-19, even if they are mild (including fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat or runny nose)

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- They have been in close contact (without personal protective equipment or other precautions) with a suspected, probable or confirmed case of COVID-19
- They recently travelled outside Ontario

More information about current screening protocols can be found on the Ministry of Health website [here](#).

Q: When can I resume non-essential services?

A: [Directive 2](#), which was issued in an updated form on May 26, 2020, permits regulated health professionals to gradually return to practice in accordance with the College's [Return to Practice Guidelines](#) and the Ministry of Health's [Health Sector Restart Requirements](#).

Opticians are no longer restricted to providing only essential and urgent care and now may carefully and gradually resume the delivery of professional opticianry services from their practice location provided they do so in accordance with these guidelines.

Q: My dispensary is located in a mall. Am I allowed to reopen?

A: [Directive 2](#), which was issued in an updated form on May 26, 2020, permits regulated health professionals to gradually return to practice in accordance with the College's [Return to Practice Guidelines](#) and the Ministry of Health's [Health Sector Restart Requirements](#).

Opticians are no longer restricted to providing only essential and urgent care and now may carefully and gradually resume the delivery of professional opticianry services from their practice location provided they do so in accordance with these guidelines.

If a dispensary is located within a shopping mall, this may create additional risks by exposing patients to surfaces that have not been properly sanitized, or where physical distancing measures have not been implemented in common commercial spaces. Opticians remain responsible for ensuring the safety of their patients, and should therefore consider whether it is appropriate to offer services from in-mall practice locations in light of these increased risks.

The College regulates the provision of opticianry services, and therefore does not have authority to determine whether an individual business is open or closed. Opticians who operate businesses may need to check with their landlord or others to determine whether any additional restrictions or rules apply to their practice location.

As set out in the Return to Practice Guidelines, the College encourages opticians to prioritize remote practice and physical distancing measures (e.g. curbside pickup) to the greatest extent possible.

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VISITOR LOG

Q: Am I required to record all visitors to the dispensary?

A: No, it is recommended, but not required, that you keep a log of all visitors to the dispensary in order to facilitate contact tracing in the event that someone in the practice environment (optician, staff or patient) later tests positive for COVID-19.

Q: Who should the visitor log apply to?

A: If you decide to maintain a visitor log, it should include everyone who enters the practice environment (patients and non-patients), including the date and time of entry.

Q: What personal details are we allowed to ask from patients and/or other visitors for contact tracing purposes?

A: You should ask for the individual's name and a way to contact them (e.g. telephone number or email address).

In all cases, consent is required to collect, use or disclose personal information (except in limited circumstances, like an emergency or where the law otherwise permits this).

Q: Can I refuse entry to someone who refuses to provide their name/contact information?

A: As an optician, you have a professional responsibility to minimize risk to your patients and engage in appropriate infection control mechanisms. Maintaining a visitor log is one way to enhance this process, in conjunction with other measures such as limiting entry to the practice environment and thorough cleaning and disinfecting protocols.

The [Standards of Practice](#) already require opticians to record patient contact information in the patient file. It is up to the individual optician to determine whether to require all others who enter the practice environment to provide their name and contact information for contact tracing purposes. In all cases, consent is required to collect, use or disclose personal information (except in limited circumstances, like an emergency or where the law otherwise permits this).

If someone is unwilling to provide their personal information, the optician may wish to contact the [Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario](#) and/or the [Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada](#) for guidance on their obligations under privacy legislation. Opticians should also consider

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whether the requested service can be provided in a way that does not require the individual to enter the practice environment (e.g. curbside pickup).

Q: What are my responsibilities with the contact information that I collect from patients and/or visitors for contact tracing purposes?

Opticians have responsibilities under privacy legislation to protect personal information that is collected from patients and others in the practice environment. The *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA)* is a federal law that addresses the collection, use and disclosure of personal information in relation to commercial activities that fall outside of healthcare. Examples of personal information may include a person's name and personal contact information.

Under *PIPEDA*, someone engaging in commercial activities must do the following when collecting, using or disclosing personal information:

- Identify the purpose for which the personal information will be used at the time that you collect it, and only collect the minimum amount of information necessary to achieve that purpose
- Obtain the person's consent to collect, use or disclose their personal information (except in limited circumstances, like an emergency or where the law otherwise permits this)
- Only use, disclose or retain the information in order to achieve the identified purpose
- Protect the information with appropriate safeguards against loss, theft, unauthorized access, disclosure, copying, use or modification
- Provide access to the person to whom the information relates, if they request it, and permit them to correct it if necessary
- Make the organization's privacy policies readily available
- Have a procedure in place to address any complaints relating to personal information, and investigate all complaints

Opticians may wish to contact the [Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario](#) and/or the [Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada](#) for further guidance.

Q: Do we have to keep visitor logs for 7 years as we do with patient records?

A: Under the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA)*, personal information relating to commercial activities should only be retained as long as is required to carry out the purpose that the information was collected for.

Opticians may wish to contact the [Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario](#) and/or the [Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada](#) for further guidance.

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PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Use of Masks by Opticians and Non-Opticians

Q: Who is required to wear a mask in the dispensary?

A: The following guidelines apply to mask use by individuals in the dispensary setting:

	Is mask required?	Type of Personal Protective Equipment/Protocols
Patients or Visitors	Required	Non-medical (cloth) or face covering
Opticians, working within 2 metres of a patient who screens negative for COVID-19	Required	Surgical mask and hand hygiene
Opticians, working at more than 2 metres from the patient	Recommended	Surgical mask and hand hygiene
Opticians, working within 2 metres of a patient who screens positive for COVID-19	Required	Surgical mask, isolation gown, gloves, eye protection, and hand hygiene
Staff, where physical distance cannot be maintained	Recommended	Surgical mask and hand hygiene

For more information, see the Ministry of Health [Operational Requirements](#) guidelines.

Q: Is it mandatory for patients to wear a mask when visiting the dispensary?

A: Yes. Under the Ministry of Health [Operational Requirements](#) guidelines, health professionals are required to post signage at the entrance to the office/clinic and at reception areas requiring all patients and any visitors to wear a face covering/non-medical mask (if available and tolerated) and perform hand hygiene prior to reporting to reception.

Q: Can I refuse entry to someone who refuses to comply with a by-law and/or store policy that requires patients and visitors to wear a mask when entering the dispensary?

A: Dispensary operators may establish policies that require patients and/or visitors to wear masks when on the premises, provided they do not conflict with any federal, provincial, regional or municipal laws or by-laws (where such laws/by-laws exist).

In the event that a patient or visitor indicates that they are unable to wear a mask, entry should only be refused after considering whether any reasonable accommodations are warranted in the circumstances

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in order to account for factors such as the individual's health, age, or religion. Accommodations may include offering service by appointment only when no other patients and/or staff members are present.

Q: Is it mandatory for opticians to wear a mask in the dispensary?

A: All health care practitioners are required under the Ministry of Health [Operational Requirements](#) guidelines to wear a medical (surgical) mask for all interactions with and within 2 metres of a patient. In addition, various municipalities and regions in Ontario have now passed laws or by-laws regarding the use of masks in indoor public spaces. Opticians must also follow any other laws or by-laws regarding the wearing of face masks (whether medical or non-medical) in indoor spaces, where such laws or by-laws are in place. These rules differ from region to region, and it is the responsibility of the optician to be familiar with any rules that apply to their place(s) of practice.

Dispensary Owners/Facility Operators

Q: Am I required to close my store if I suspect a patient or staff member has been exposed to or is displaying symptoms of COVID-19?

A: If you operate a dispensary and suspect (but have not confirmed) that someone in the dispensary has been exposed to COVID-19, it is important to immediately assess the situation and take steps to reasonably minimize the potential risks to staff and patients. These steps may or may not include closing the store, depending on the circumstances.

At a minimum, it will be important to closely monitor the situation and take steps to ensure that anyone who screens positive for possible COVID-19 infection (including those awaiting test results) does not attend at the dispensary again until they have self-isolated in accordance with public health guidelines. Opticians should also disinfect any surfaces, equipment or tools that the individual may have come in contact with. Opticians may also wish to consider additional precautions, such as advising all individuals (staff and/or patients) who came in contact with the individual in question to monitor themselves for symptoms.

It is important to note that opticians who employ other individuals may have additional obligations under Employment Standards and Occupational Health and Safety Legislation. Employers may wish to obtain legal advice regarding these obligations.

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Q: What steps should I take if someone who was recently at the dispensary (e.g. staff member or patient) has identified that they have been infected with COVID-19?

A: If you operate a dispensary and become aware that someone who recently visited the dispensary (e.g. staff member or patient) has a confirmed COVID-19 infection, it is important to immediately assess the situation and take steps to reasonably minimize the potential risks to staff and patients. These steps may or may not include closing the store, depending on the circumstances.

At a minimum, it will be important to assess the following:

- Whether any staff members may have been exposed to COVID-19 and should therefore self-isolate before returning to the workplace (see the Return to Practice Guidelines on self-isolating for more information)
- Whether any patients or visitors may have been exposed to COVID-19 and should therefore be contacted

In addition, the optician should disinfect any surfaces, equipment or tools that the individual may have come in contact with.

It is important to note that opticians who employ other individuals may have additional obligations under Employment Standards and Occupational Health and Safety Legislation. Employers may wish to obtain legal advice regarding these obligations.

Q: Where can opticians access Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

A: The Ontario Government has established a [website](#) and a [directory](#) to connect businesses with PPE suppliers.

Q: Am I required to wear a surgical mask for situations where I am working close to the patient?

A: Yes. Under the Ministry of Health's [Health Sector Restart Requirements](#), you are required to wear a surgical/procedure mask for all interactions with an within 2 metres of patients who screen negative for COVID-19. You must also perform hand hygiene before and after contact with the patient and the patient environment and after the removal of PPE. Use of eye protection (goggles or face shield) should also be considered.

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Q: Can I use a cloth mask instead of a surgical mask?

A: A cloth mask is not a suitable alternative for a surgical mask. Where guidelines require the use of a surgical mask, a cloth mask is not appropriate.

Q: Would a cloth mask be appropriate when working at a distance from the patient?

A: It is up to the optician to use professional judgment to determine whether to wear a non-surgical mask or face covering when working at a distance from the patient, having regard to the following considerations:

- Non-medical masks are not a substitute for surgical masks, which must be worn when interacting with or within 2 metres of a patient.
- Non-medical masks will not prevent the wearer from contracting COVID-19. Health officials have agreed, however, that the use of a non-medical mask may reduce the risk of respiratory droplets from contaminating others or landing on surfaces.
- Non-medical masks must be cleaned regularly (typically after each use) to prevent cross-contamination.

Q: When do I need to wear full PPE?

A: Under the Ministry of Health's [Health Sector Restart Requirements](#), you are required to use the following PPE for all interactions with and within 2 metres of a patient who screens positive for COVID-19:

- Surgical/procedure mask
- Isolation gown
- Gloves
- Eye protection (goggles or face shield)
- Perform hand hygiene before and after contact with the patient and the patient environment and after the removal of PPE

The College recommends that opticians defer non-urgent vision care until the patient is well.

Q: Where can we get plexiglass or plastic shields for counters and/or equipment?

A: The Ontario Government has established a [website](#) and a [directory](#) to connect businesses with PPE suppliers.

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Q: Do I have to change masks between patients?

A: Changing masks in between patients is optimal, but where supplies are limited, opticians should consult contingency strategies recommended by public health authorities, such as the [CDC](#) or [WHO](#).

Q: Should I require patients wash their hands with soap and water when arriving?

A: Under the [Return to Practice Guidelines](#) you are required to implement hand sanitation at the entrance/exit. This may include a hand washing station or providing alcohol-based hand sanitizer (that has been approved by [Health Canada](#))

Q: Can I refuse service if my employer will not supply me with PPE?

A: As a health professional, you are required to comply with [Directive 2](#), which requires use of PPE for certain patient interactions (e.g. surgical mask if working with or within 2 metres). You should decline service if you are not able to access the necessary PPE, or determine whether the service can be provided in an alternative way that does not require close contact.

Q: Do patients/customers need to wear a mask?

A: It is up to the optician to determine whether masks will be made available to patients and whether they will recommend or require patients or customers to wear PPE or non-medical masks or face coverings when attending at the dispensary or when being provided with opticianry care.

If a patient is unable or unwilling to comply with a store policy regarding use of PPE or non-medical masks, opticians should consider alternate ways of providing service that maintains physical distance, such as remote service. Where no alternatives to close physical contact are available, the optician should use professional judgment to determine whether it is in the patient's best interest to decline the requested service.

CONTACT LENSES

Q: Am I allowed to perform initial contact lens fittings?

A: Yes, however it is important to remember that research continues to be conducted on the risk of transmitting COVID-19 via tear film and/or direct contact with the ocular membrane. The College continues to recommend that opticians limit the performance of initial contact lens fittings at this time. Opticians who choose to perform initial contact lens fittings must ensure that they take steps to mitigate the potential risk by adhering to requirements set out in the Return to Practice Guidelines with respect to initial contact lens fittings. Where the risk level cannot be appropriately mitigated, the optician should refer the patient to another healthcare provider.

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Q: Can I perform slit lamp checks?

A: It is recommended that opticians exercise caution when performing slit lamp checks on a patient, and use appropriate PPE and/or physical barriers, including surgical mask, face shield and/or plexiglass shield.

Q: If a current contact lens patient has a new Rx and requires follow up, would that constitute a new fit?

A: Opticians can use professional judgment to provide follow up care to established contact lens patients, but it is recommended that any service that requires direct contact between the optician and the patient's eye or eyelid be deferred or delayed at this time. If urgent care is required, the optician must take all necessary precautions, including screening practices, hand hygiene and PPE where appropriate.

Q: Can we dispense replacement contact lenses to someone who is not an existing patient, but who already wears contact lenses and has details of the contact lenses they currently wear?

A: Under existing Practice Guidelines, an optician may consider someone to be an “established contact lens patient” for the purposes of dispensing replacement contact lenses where that person has previously been dispensed contact lenses by another person authorized to dispense in Ontario, provided they have access to the relevant information from the patient file.

If a patient is seeking replacement contact lenses that is neither an existing patient nor one where the patient health record is available, the optician should consider the following factors before determining whether it is appropriate to dispense replacement contact lenses to the patient without conducting a new fitting:

- The patient's health history
- The type of lens required (e.g. soft or rigid)

Where no patient file is available, the optician should take all pertinent health history and might consider working with parameters supplied by the patient from their existing contact lenses to dispense a minimum supply of contact lenses to assist the patient during this period. Where the optician is of the view that they do not have sufficient information to dispense appropriate lenses, they should decline to do so.

EYEGASSES AND FRAMES

Q: Can I dispense eyeglasses if the patient has not tried on the frames?

A: The [Standards of Practice](#) and [Return to Practice Guidelines](#) empower opticians to use professional judgment to engage in remote practice and to decide whether it is appropriate to deliver eyeglasses prior to fitting and adapting them to the patient. It is important to consider factors such as:

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- The patient's age and health
- Degree of anisometropia
- The prescription details and/or the type of lens being dispensed
- Whether you have measurements on file, and whether those measurements were taken in person or remotely
- Any other reason where it is in the patient's interest to require an in person meeting

The [Return to Practice Guidelines](#) and the Ministry of Health's [Health Sector Restart Requirements](#) both emphasize the need to prioritize remote care at this time. Opticians should consider ways of minimizing the need for close physical contact with patients. If you decide that it is appropriate to use remote delivery to dispense eyeglasses prior to fitting/adapting, or where the patient has not tried on the frames, it is important to explain to the patient how this might impact the eyewear's performance, and document this discussion in the patient file.

Q: Should frames be made inaccessible to the patient?

A: Opticians must take steps to reduce the likelihood that frames or other retail products will be touched or handled by patients such as placing frames and other retail items in display cases or behind barriers, or by posting signs asking individuals to request assistance before handling items. A system should be in place to ensure that any frames that are handled by a patient, optician or staff person is disinfected after each handling.

Q: What should I use to disinfect frames?

A: It is up to the optician to ensure that the method they use will disinfect effectively, and is appropriate to the frame material, having regard to manufacturer recommendations. Reference has been made in existing literature to the following methods for cleaning and disinfecting eyeglass frames:

- Soap and water: rinse the frames in clean, warm, running water. Cover all areas of the frame with soap, and use physical agitation to lather for at least 20 seconds. Rinse well under clean warm running water. Dry the frames using a clean single-use cloth. Ensure that the clean frames are placed in a sanitized tray or container. Thoroughly wash hands before returning the frames to the frame board or storage.

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- Hydrogen Peroxide Wipes: Wipe every part of the frames with a single-use hydrogen peroxide wipe. Discard the wipe and place the frames in a sanitized tray or container. Thoroughly wash hands before returning the frames to the frame board or storage.
- Hydrogen Peroxide Solution: Mix equal parts 3% hydrogen peroxide solution and water. Use a spray bottle to spray the solution on the frames, or moisten a clean single-use cloth and wipe every area of the frames. Ensure that the clean frames are placed in a sanitized tray or container. Thoroughly wash hands before returning the frames to the frame board or storage.
- Alcohol solutions with at least 60%-80% alcohol: wipe every part of the frames with a single-use cloth or wipe that has been saturated with alcohol solution that has a minimum 60%-80% alcohol concentration. Discard the wipe and place the frames in a sanitized tray or container. Thoroughly wash hands before returning the frames to the frame board or storage.

Q: Can I use UV or other methods not listed above to disinfect frames?

A: It is up to the optician to ensure that the method they use will disinfect effectively, and is appropriate to the frame material, having regard to manufacturer recommendations. The methods listed above have been referenced in existing literature, however the list may not be exhaustive. It is important to ensure that the method you choose has been reliably tested.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Q: Are there government grants/funds available to help opticians obtain PPE? Can the College lobby the government for this?

A: Under the Ministry of Health's [Health Sector Restart Requirements](#), it is the responsibility of employers and health care providers to ensure that there is adequate PPE for staff members in the health setting. At present, there is no indication that funding or grants will be made available to health care providers to obtain PPE.

STUDENT REQUIREMENTS

Q: Will there be any consideration to reduce the amount of contact lens fits that student opticians are required to obtain since it is recommended to not do them at this time.

A: No. Many of the educational and registration requirements necessary to become a Registered Optician, including the requirements to complete an accredited educational program, the national examinations, and 1000 hours of dispensing experience, are non-exemptible requirements in the

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regulation and cannot be waived. This regulation ensures that all registered opticians meet the standards for safe and competent care to the public. Currently, there is no shortage of opticians during the pandemic, so at this time, the COO is not considering the introduction of a temporary or time limited registration certificate to fast track new registrations.

CE CREDITS

Q: What are the accreditation details for the Return to Practice Webinar held on May 15, 2020?

A: Accreditation number #3819, 1.5 PG

Q: Since large seminars are cancelled, how will we complete our continuing education hours?

A: Many providers are offering webinars and distance education modules.

For a [list of providers](#) please see our website.

GENERAL

Q: Do I need to self-isolate after inter-provincial travel?

A: You should follow your regional/local public health guidelines. The current [COVID-19 Patient Screening Guidance Document](#) published by the Ministry of Health indicates travel outside of Ontario as a standard screening question.