

# Frequently Asked Questions

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### HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This FAQ document has been developed to help opticians interpret their professional obligations and navigate practice challenges in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be read in conjunction with the [Standards of Practice](#) and the practice guidelines within that document, as well as the [COVID-19 Practice Guidelines](#).

Where an FAQ indicates that an optician “must” or “shall” do something or refrain from doing something, this represents a **mandatory requirement** that must be followed by the optician in order to comply with the standards or guidelines.

Where an FAQ indicate that an optician “may”, “should”, “should consider” or is “encouraged” to do something or refrain from doing something, it is considered a **recommendation**. Recommendations are not mandatory; rather, they indicate a best practice that opticians are encouraged to consider.

### MASKS

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

**A:** Effective June 11, 2022, the directives that require opticians and patients to wear masks in the dispensary environment have been revoked. This means that it is not mandatory for opticians, staff, patients or visitors to wear a mask in the dispensary.

It is important to remember, however, that opticians remain responsible for maintaining safety and infection control standards in the practice environment. Masks remain an important way to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. It is therefore recommended that opticians continue to wear a mask that is surgical grade or higher when working in close proximity to patients, and that they require any non-optician staff to do the same. While not mandatory, opticians are also encouraged to consider implementing a mask policy for patients and visitors (with necessary provisions to accommodate those who are unable to wear a mask due to a disability or another recognized exemption). For more information please see the [COVID-19 Practice Guidelines](#).

#### ***Q: Can I still implement a mask policy in my dispensary?***

**A:** Yes. Individual businesses are permitted to implement their own policies for use of masks in the dispensary environment. Opticians must continue to offer reasonable accommodations to patients who are unable to wear a mask due to a disability or who qualify for other recognized exemptions (e.g. children under 2 years of age).

#### ***Q: What should I do if a patient is unable or unwilling to wear a mask?***

**A:** Opticians have a duty to offer reasonable accommodations to patients who are unable to wear a mask

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due to a disability or who qualify for other recognized exemptions (e.g. children under 2 years of age). Opticians should consider ways to accommodate the patient in a way that will keep themselves, staff and other patients safe (e.g. offering to schedule an appointment when other patients will not be present, or offering to provide services remotely). It is not necessary for the patient to provide proof of their mask exemption.

***Q: My employer is telling me not to wear a mask. What should I do?***

**A:** If your employer is instructing you not to wear a mask, it is important that you have a discussion with them about your obligations under the [Standards of Practice](#) and [COVID-19 Practice Guidelines](#) to maintain a safe practice environment. While no longer mandatory, masks remain an important way to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and are recommended for use by both opticians and patients, in particular when working in close proximity. In the alternative, you are responsible for demonstrating that other measures have been implemented that will be effective in reducing the risk of infection or transmission in the dispensary. For more information see the [COVID-19 Practice Guidelines](#).

***Q: Can a patient request/require that I wear a mask?***

**A:** Opticians are encouraged to wear a mask where this has been specifically requested by a patient.

***Q: Can my employer/manager/supervisor require me to wear a mask?***

**A:** The COO does not regulate the internal workplace policies of optical dispensaries. Opticians who have questions about their employment obligations should contact a qualified legal professional.

If your employer has implemented a mask policy for patients/visitors, be reminded that you have a professional obligation to accommodate patients who are unable to wear a mask due to a disability or who qualify for other recognized exemptions.

### COVID-19 VACCINE

***Q: Are opticians required to be vaccinated against COVID-19?***

**A:** While not mandatory, vaccines play a vital role in preventing the spread of COVID-19. As healthcare professionals who often work in close contact with patients, the College encourages opticians to consider getting vaccinated as a way to protect yourselves and your patients. For more information on vaccine availability and safety, please visit the Ontario Government website [here](#).

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***Q: Can/should I require my employees/interns/students to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in order to work with patients?***

**A:** As an optician, you have a professional responsibility to take reasonable steps to ensure patient safety by reducing the risk of COVID-19 being spread in the dispensary environment. Every dispensary is different, and it's up to the individual optician to use their professional judgment to determine what steps or workplace policies will best ensure patient safety, including some or all of the following:

- COVID-19 vaccination for opticians, interns, students and staff
- COVID-19 testing for opticians, interns, students and staff
- Screening patients, opticians, interns, students and staff
- Physical distancing/barriers
- Masks and/or other personal protective equipment
- Capacity limits and/or appointment systems
- Cleaning and disinfection protocols
- Ventilation upgrades

**\*Note for Employers:** The College's mandate is to ensure that opticians follow the standards of practice with respect to safety and infection control in the practice environment. Any questions relating to an optician's rights or obligations as an employer should be directed to a qualified legal professional.

***Q: Do I have to disclose my vaccine status to my patients?***

**A:** No. Your vaccine status is private and does not need to be disclosed to your patients. You are still encouraged to explain to your patients what steps you have taken to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the practice environment.

***Q: Can I choose to disclose or advertise my vaccine status to patients?***

**A:** Yes. If you wish to disclose your vaccine status to patients you are entitled to do so. It is important to note that you should seek legal advice before disclosing the vaccine status of any other individual (e.g. your employees). It is also important to remember that opticians are responsible for ensuring that any advertisements associated with their practice are accurate and don't include any information that is false or misleading.

***Q: I'm fully vaccinated. Do I still need to isolate/quarantine for 14 days after returning from international/interprovincial travel?***

**A:** It is the responsibility of each individual optician to take steps to ensure a safe practice environment for patients.

Under the College's Standards and Return to Practice Guidelines, opticians are expected to comply with any federal, provincial or local regulations that are in place regarding quarantine and self-isolation

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following travel. Opticians must also use professional judgment to determine whether any additional steps should be taken to ensure they are meeting safety and infection control standards in the dispensary environment.

Rules relating to quarantines following international travel are set by the Federal Government. Information relating to exemptions can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

Please note that rules and regulations are subject to change and it is the optician's responsibility to verify the latest requirements before returning to work following travel.

### PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT

***Q: Will I still be required to clean and disinfect frames between patients handling them after the government eases remaining mandates?***

**A:** Yes. The Standards of Practice have always required opticians to maintain protocols that mitigate the spread of infectious agents and preserve patient safety. This requirement is not a temporary pandemic related measure. Please refer to our [Practice Guidelines](#) for further guidance.

***Q: Do I still have to screen all patients/visitors, including individuals who are fully vaccinated?***

**A:** The Ontario Ministry of Health has provided the following guidance with respect to Point of Care Risk Assessment (PCRA) for regulated health professionals:

*A PCRA should be completed by every health care worker before every patient interaction and task to determine whether there is a risk to the health care worker or other individuals of being exposed to an infection, including COVID-19.*

We recognize that many practice settings have a large, open display area for browsing. Dispensary operators may wish to consider the use of passive screening signage at dispensary entry points while RO's consider the use of active screening if dispensing is taking place in close proximity.

For more information see the [COVID-19 Guidance: Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) for Health Care Workers and Health Care Entities](#).

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

**A:** Hand hygiene is recommended, but not required, under the COO's [COVID-19 Practice Guidelines](#).

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***Q: Can I 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:** Opticians may provide in person services to individuals who screen positive for COVID-19 provided they take any appropriate precautions, such as use of additional 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. For more information, see the [COVID-19 Guidance: Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) for Health Care Workers and Health Care Entities](#) published by the Ministry of Health.

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.

In most cases, it is recommended that patients who are showing symptoms of 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.

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

**A:** Optical stores are no longer required to operate on an appointment-only basis or maintain specific capacity limits. However, individual stores may choose to implement their own internal policies that limit capacity or require appointment systems.

***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.

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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 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).



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***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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### CONTACT LENSES

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

**A:** Yes. The College is not restricting opticians from performing contact lens fittings. It is recommended that opticians exercise care when performing contact lens fittings, including initial contact lens fittings, to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 via tear films and/or direct contact with the ocular membrane. Please refer to our [COVID-19 Practice Guidelines](#) for further guidance.

***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 [COVID-19 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:

- The patient’s age and health
- Degree of anisometropia

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- 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

**Q: Should frames be made inaccessible to the patient?**

**A:** It is recommended, but not required, that opticians 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.

**Q: What should I use to disinfect frames?**

The College does not have any recommendations on specific disinfectants.

Public Health recommends consulting with your frame or equipment manufacturer for disinfecting regimes that are effective yet compatible with their products.

Public Health speaks to different levels of classification of Medical Devices and the Required Level of Cleaning.

This chart is an excerpt from [Best Practices for Cleaning, Disinfection and Sterilization of Medical Equipment/Devices](#). It outlines Spaulding Classification which is the instrument classification system used for reprocessing decisions. For more information, please visit [www.publichealthontario.ca](http://www.publichealthontario.ca) or email [ipac@oahpp.ca](mailto:ipac@oahpp.ca).

Classification	Definition	Level of Processing/ Reprocessing	Examples
<b>CRITICAL Equipment/Device</b>	Equipment/device that enters sterile tissues, including the vascular system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleaning followed by Sterilization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surgical instruments</li> <li>• Implants</li> <li>• Biopsy instruments</li> <li>• Foot care equipment</li> <li>• Eye and dental equipment</li> </ul>
<b>SEMICRITICAL Equipment/Device</b>	Equipment/device that comes in contact with non-intact skin or mucous membranes but does not penetrate them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleaning followed by High- Level Disinfection (as a minimum)</li> <li>• Sterilization is preferred</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respiratory therapy equipment</li> <li>• Anaesthesia equipment</li> <li>• Tonometer</li> </ul>
<b>NONCRITICAL Equipment/Device</b>	Equipment/device that touches only intact skin and not mucous membranes, or does not directly touch the client/patient/resident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleaning followed by Low- Level Disinfection (in some cases, cleaning alone is acceptable)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECG machines</li> <li>• Oximeters</li> <li>• Bedpans, urinals, commodes</li> </ul>

**References**

Spaulding E. The role of chemical disinfection in the prevention of nosocomial infections. In: Proceedings of the International Conference on Nosocomial Infections, 1970. Chicago, IL: American Hospital Association; 1971. p. 247-54.

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Consider what level of contact the frame or other optical equipment has made with the patient and follow the appropriate level of reprocessing required.

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

**A:** Public Health has identified UV as ***not*** effective for contaminants on hard surfaces.

### 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.

***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:

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- 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.