

COVID-19 Emergency Practice Guidelines

On March 19, 2020 the Chief Medical Officer issued a directive that requires all health care providers in Ontario to immediately cease all non-essential and elective services, or reduce them to minimal levels, until further notice. Allowable exceptions can be made for time sensitive circumstances to avert or avoid negative patient outcomes or to avert or avoid a situation that would have a direct impact on the safety of patients.

The College of Opticians of Ontario has developed the following emergency practice guidelines for registered opticians who are continuing to provide essential opticianry services to patients. These guidelines are intended as temporary measures to reduce the risk to opticians and patients in the course of delivering essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These practice guidelines must be read in conjunction with the Standards of Practice, which continue to apply.

The purpose of these emergency guidelines is to ensure that patients continue to be able to access essential opticianry services in a manner that is as safe as possible in the circumstances.

General Guidelines

Essential Services

Service can only be considered essential in cases where the patient's eye health or their ability to function would considerably decline if service was not provided. All other services, while an important part of one's overall vision care, would be considered non-essential during this time. **What constitutes essential service will be up to each optician's individual judgement.** It may include such circumstances as providing replacement eyeglasses or contact lenses where the patient is without.

Opticians should decline to provide services in circumstances where they determine that:

- The service is not essential
- The optician does not have enough information in order to dispense an appropriate device to the patient
- The optician is unable to ensure that the product can be dispensed in a manner that will be safe and in the patient's best interest

Opticians are considered the "most responsible dispenser" for any product that they dispense.

Telepractice/Remote Practice

If an optician determines that a particular service is essential, it is recommended that the optician consider providing the service remotely, or otherwise take steps to avoid or limit any close patient contact, such as:

- Using a drop off/pick up tray to deliver ophthalmic appliances, that is sanitized before and after each use

- Scheduling appointments in advance and ensuring no more than 1 patient in the dispensary at any time

It is highly recommended that opticians consider all available alternatives to close physical contact prior to providing a service that requires the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Frontline healthcare providers are in urgent need of PPE and opticians should avoid competing for these scarce resources. If an in person meeting is required and it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres, opticians should use appropriate PPE.

Record Keeping and Privacy

Regardless of whether essential services are provided remotely or in person, opticians must ensure that they maintain complete and accurate records in accordance with the Standards, and comply with all privacy requirements under the Standards and the legislation, including the Personal Health Information Protection Act.

Follow Up Care

It is recommended that the optician maintain a record or list of all patients for whom they provide a service during this period in order to ensure that patients receive appropriate follow up care and adjustments.

Guidelines to Standard 3 of the Standards of Practice: Dispensing of Appropriate Optical Devices

1. The Prescription (Rx)

Opticians must only dispense based on a valid prescription. Opticians are expected to use professional judgment to determine whether it is appropriate to:

- diverge from any expiry dates, notes or other recommendations included on a prescription, or
- duplicate a prescription currently worn by the patient in the absence of a prescription

Prior to any duplication, opticians are expected to take steps to verify the prescription, including contacting the prescriber or previous eye care provider. In cases where this information cannot be obtained, and the optician has determined the service to be essential, the optician must use professional judgment to determine whether duplication is appropriate, having regard to factors such as the patient's age and health, the date of their last eye exam, and prescription details.

Duplication or significant divergence from any information on a prescription must be noted in the patient file and the optician must communicate any potential risks to the patient and note this conversation in the patient file.

The optician should have the patient come in as soon as it is safe to do so for follow up care and adjustments.

2. Dispensing Eyeglasses

Opticians must fully adhere to all requirements in the Standards of Practice with respect to:

- Reviewing the patient’s history and any relevant factors affecting eyeglass wear
- Reviewing the details of the prescription
- Advising the patient regarding appropriate ophthalmic lenses and frames
- Verifying the accuracy of the completed eyeglasses to ensure they are as ordered and within tolerance
- Counseling the patient on aspects of eyeglass wear
- In the case of safety eyewear, adhering to appropriate safety standards
- Ensuring the practice environment has the appropriate tools and equipment

Taking appropriate measurements for eyeglasses

Opticians should make best efforts to use existing measurement information where available. This may include working from the patient’s existing frame measurements for appropriate sizing or requesting the patient’s consent to contact their previous eyecare provider or obtain a copy of their patient health record.

In the event that no information is available, opticians may consider alternate ways of determining the patient’s measurements while maintaining safe physical distance.

If the optician believes that the eyeglasses may not perform to the patient’s full expectations, they should communicate this to the patient and ensure that the patient gives their informed consent to the service. This conversation should be noted in the patient file.

Fitting, adapting and delivering the eyeglasses to the patient

Under the existing Standards of Practice and Practice Guidelines, opticians may use professional judgment to determine whether it is appropriate to deliver eyeglasses prior to fitting and adapting them to the patient.

In light of the current pandemic, opticians are encouraged to strongly consider whether it is necessary to fit and adapt the eyeglasses at this time. All efforts should be made to avoid close physical contact with patients. Where the optician determines that close contact cannot be avoided, they should use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and take steps to properly disinfect all frames and equipment.

Opticians should make best efforts to deliver eyeglasses in a manner that is “contactless” or maintains physical distance, such as:

- Remote delivery (e.g. mail, courier)

- Creating a drop off/pick up tray that is sanitized after each use and positioned away from other individuals

Record Keeping and Follow Up Care

In all cases, opticians must keep complete and accurate records for all essential services that are provided.

Opticians should take steps to ensure that the patient comes in once it is safe to do so in order to receive any necessary follow up care and adjustments.

3. Contact Lenses

Initial Contact Lens Fitting

It is not recommended that opticians conduct initial contact lens fittings with first time contact lens wearers at this time.

Continuing Care

It is recommended that opticians maintain physical distance and/or use telepractice to the greatest extent possible in the delivery of continuing care for established contact lens patients.

In delivering continuing care, opticians must fully adhere to all requirements in the Standards of Practice with respect to:

- Reviewing the ongoing patient management plan
- Reviewing relevant factors such as the patient's age, wearing and replacement schedule, efficacy of current lens care regime and any adverse reactions associated with contact lens wear
- Using telepractice to assess, to the greatest degree possible, the following relevant factors: lens appearance and fit, wearing time, comfort, corneal clarity and integrity, stable corneal curvature, conjunctival and lid appearance, tear characteristics, visual acuity, and compliance with recommendations on lens handling, lens care and replacement
- Counselling patients on a proper contact lens hygiene practices, including maintenance and cleaning of contact lenses and cleaning and replacement of contact lens cases.

Replacement Contact Lenses

Opticians may use professional judgment to dispense replacement contact lenses to an established contact lens patient without an in-person visit. An "established contact lens patient" means:

- A patient with whom an optician has an existing patient-practitioner relationship and to whom the optician has previously dispensed contact lenses; or
- A patient with whom another person authorized to dispense in Ontario has an existing patient-practitioner relationship with the patient and has previously dispensed contact lenses to the patient, and where the necessary information and records are available and the patient has given consent for the optician to access them

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 contact lenses to the patient:

- Whether the need for replacement contact lenses is essential at this time (e.g. does the patient have eyeglasses they can wear for the time being?)
- The patient's health history
- The type of lens required (e.g. soft or rigid)

Where no patient file is available, the optician should consider working with parameters supplied by the patient from their existing contact lenses and 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.

In dispensing replacement contact lenses, opticians must fully adhere to all requirements in the Standards of Practice with respect to:

- Ensuring the patient's clinical information is reasonably current
- Determining the need for alterations to previous lens specifications and making adjustments as necessary
- Advising the patient about the need for and extent of continuing care
- Confirming the parameters of contact lenses as ordered
- Providing follow up services in accordance with the management plan

Record Keeping and Follow Up Care

In all cases, opticians must keep complete and accurate records for all essential services that are provided.

Opticians should take steps to ensure that the patient comes in once it is safe to do so in order to receive any necessary follow up care.

4. Orthokeratology

It is not recommended that opticians provide orthokeratology services at this time, as it is generally not possible to provide these services while maintaining physical distance. Opticians should consider referring the patient to an optometrist or ophthalmologist for treatment.

In the event that orthokeratology is provided, the optician should ensure that proper PPE is used, and that steps are taken to ensure proper physical distancing, including limiting the number of people in the dispensary and pre-screening any patients for possible symptoms.

5. Sub-normal vision devices

Assessing patients for low vision devices

In conducting assessments for low vision devices, opticians must fully adhere to all requirements in the Standards of Practice with respect to:

- Reviewing with the patient any relevant factors relating to the patient's environment, work, hobbies, regular activities, and/or physical factors
- Reviewing any referral or prescription details
- Advising the patient regarding appropriate ophthalmic appliance(s)
- Verifying the accuracy of any completed appliances to ensure they meet required tolerances
- Counselling the patient on aspects of appliance usage such as expectations, limitations, customary adaptation period and maintenance requirements

It is recommended that where possible, initial assessments for low-vision devices that are determined to be essential be conducted via telephone or video conference to ascertain the patient's potential needs.

If an in-person visit is necessary, the optician should take steps to ensure that physical distance is maintained and that all equipment is sanitized before and after use.

Taking appropriate measurements for any custom appliances

Opticians should make best efforts to use existing measurement information where available. This may include working off of the patient's existing appliance measurements for appropriate sizing or requesting the patient's consent to contact their previous eyecare provider or obtain a copy of their patient health record.

In the event that no information is available, opticians may consider alternate ways of determining the patient's measurements while maintaining safe physical distance.

Device delivery and fitting/adapting the appliance to the patient

Where possible, opticians should consider whether it is appropriate to deliver any completed low vision appliances to the patient via remote means, such as mail or courier.

In the alternative, consider ways that appliances can be fit or adapted while maintaining physical distance, such as adjusting the appliance from a distance, sanitizing it and then moving away while the patient tests the appliance (with or without the assistance of a member of their household).

Record Keeping and Follow Up Care

In all cases, opticians must keep complete and accurate records for all essential services that are provided.

Opticians should take steps to ensure that the patient comes in once it is safe to do so in order to receive any necessary follow up care and adjustments.

Guidelines to Standard 4 of the Standards of Practice: Safety and Infection Control in the Practice Environment

Adhering to federal, provincial and municipal requirements regarding safety and infection control

Opticians should regularly review information released by federal, provincial and municipal authorities on:

- Disinfection best practices
- Physical distancing protocols
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Screening patients and potential patients for COVID-19 symptoms and risk factors

Disinfection techniques

All frames, surfaces and equipment such as pupilometers should be regularly disinfected after they have been touched by any staff person or patient. A diluted bleach solution or alcohol solution with at least 70% alcohol are the most effective.

Safety and infection control measures

Opticians should take the following safety and infection control steps in the provision of essential services:

- Scheduling appointments ahead of time for any essential service, ensuring only one patient in the dispensary at a time
- Asking patients to complete a pre-screening tool before accepting appointments
- Posting signs in the dispensary asking patients who are feeling unwell to reschedule
- Including messaging on websites, voicemail and emails asking patients to reschedule if not well and advising of delivery options for contacts and eyeglasses
- Upon arrival at the dispensary, asking patients if they are experiencing fever, cough, or shortness of breath and/or have recently returned from travel outside of Canada and reschedule appointments as needed
- Avoiding physical contact with patients when providing service and maintain a distance of at least 2 metres.
- In urgent scenarios that require care at a distance that is less than the recommended safe working distance (2 metres), use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), or consider referring the patient to a colleague who has PPE available
- Performing adjustments not deemed essential at a later date.
- Removing products, such as frames, from public display to prevent them from exposure to airborne contaminants and/or direct contact by patients
- Washing hands between patients for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water
- Implement a sanitizing schedule to ensure that commonly used spaces are regularly disinfected