

COVID-19 Return to Practice Guidelines for Registered Opticians

The College of Opticians of Ontario has developed the following practice guidelines for Registered Opticians who will be returning to practice in line with amended [Directive 2](#) issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Ontario on May 26, 2020.

Under the amended directive, regulated health professionals may gradually restart all deferred, non-essential and elective services provided they comply with the requirements set out in [COVID-19 Operational Requirements: Health Sector Restart](#) including the following:

- The completion of **Point of Care Risk Assessment** prior to every patient interaction.
- The implementation of **Droplet and Contact** precautions for all interactions within 2 metres of patients who screen positive for COVID-19.
- The use of **surgical masks** and **hand hygiene procedures** by the health professional for all interactions within 2 metres of patients who screen negative for COVID-19.
- The implementation of the following **approaches to minimizing risk**, which are listed in order of importance (i.e. the “hierarchy of hazard controls”):
 1. **Eliminations and substitution:** finding ways to reduce or eliminate the need for close physical proximity between the optician and the patient (e.g. using remote practice wherever possible or alternate methods of performing measurements)
 2. **Engineering and system control measures:** physical barriers (e.g. plexiglass), ventilation upgrades
 3. **Administrative measures:** active screening (each patient at time of booking and when they attend for service) and passive screening (signage)
 4. **Personal Protective Equipment:** gloves, surgical masks, gowns, facial/eye protection (face shields, goggles), etc.

The purpose of these Guidelines is to provide additional information on how opticians should interpret the Standards of Practice in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A return to practice does not mean a return to business as usual. While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose a public health risk, it will be incumbent on all registrants to take extra precautions to ensure safety for themselves, their patients and their staff. It is also important that opticians demonstrate to their patients and staff that measures have been taken to ensure their health and safety, through regular communication on the protocols taken by the dispensary, and visible implementation of those protocols (e.g. cleaning and disinfection frames and equipment in front of the patient).

These Guidelines must be read in conjunction with the [Standards of Practice](#) (“Standards”), which continue to apply.

Under **Standard 4: Safety and Infection Control in the Practice Environment**, opticians must take reasonable and appropriate measures to minimize the risk of contamination and subsequent transmission of infectious agents within their practice environment. They must also ensure that the practice site is equipped and maintained, and that procedures are in place to ensure health and safety of both patients and staff. Failing to meet this Standard is a form of professional misconduct and could result in a referral to the discipline committee.

The College recognizes that there are many differences between practice environments, and that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. For that reason, these Guidelines have been drafted broadly to accommodate these differences while emphasizing the need for registrants to keep health and safety considerations paramount.

Opticians that employ others or operate a health facility must also familiarize themselves with their additional obligations under Occupational Health and Safety legislation.

These guidelines will be updated continually as new information becomes available. Please review these Guidelines on a regular basis to ensure currency.

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1. Before Returning to Work

<p>Self-Isolating</p>	<p>Opticians or dispensary staff who have recently travelled, tested positive, experienced symptoms, or been exposed to COVID-19 should not return to work or continue to work until they have self-isolated in accordance with federal, provincial, and regional/local public health guidelines. This will typically mean self-isolating for at least 14 days after any of the following occur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You test positive for COVID-19 or are awaiting test results • You experience symptoms of COVID-19, even if they are mild (including fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat or a runny nose) • You have been in close contact (without personal protective equipment or other precautions) with a suspected, probable, or confirmed case of COVID-19 • You recently travelled outside of Canada • You recently travelled to a COVID-19 affected area, within or outside of Ontario. An exception may be made for essential or emergency care where all of the following conditions are met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It is not possible or practical to refer the patient to another healthcare provider ○ No COVID-19 symptoms are present ○ You practice thorough hand hygiene and use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment, including surgical mask
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2. The Practice Environment

<p>Dispensary Considerations</p>	<p>In order to comply with Standard 4, opticians must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • *New May 28, 2021* Public Health and Emergency Orders. Opticians must comply with any federal, provincial, regional or municipal orders, laws or by-laws relating to public health or emergency measures, including requirements relating to capacity limits, appointments and/or hour restrictions. • Hand Sanitation at Entry. Opticians should set up a hand washing station and/or providing alcohol-based hand sanitizer (that has been approved by Health Canada) for use at the entrance and exit. • Implement physical distancing measures in the workplace, which may include some or all of the following, as applicable/appropriate:
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encouraging individuals to attend by appointment only and/or limiting the number of walk-ins. ○ Limiting the number of individuals in the dispensary at any given time to no more than is necessary in the circumstances. ○ 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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Remove non-essential items from waiting areas, such as magazines or pamphlets. ● Reduce unnecessary handling. Take steps to reduce the likelihood that frames or other retail items will be touched or handled by patients or customers, 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. ● Regularly clean and disinfect common areas and other high-touch surfaces and objects, such as doors, light switches, counter tops, hand rails, keyboards, touch screens and payment pin pads. ● Mask Policies. Ensure compliance with any federal, provincial, regional or municipal laws or by-laws regarding the use of masks or face coverings by regulated health professionals, staff, patients and members of the public, including the Ministry of Health Operational Requirements guidelines and various municipal or regional by-laws. Please note that these rules may vary from region to region and are subject to change. Opticians are responsible for regularly reviewing current rules and guidelines. <p>For Additional Consideration:</p> <p>In addition, opticians may wish to consider the following additional measures/ safeguards, where possible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cleaning/Disinfection Schedule. Implementing a more frequent cleaning/disinfecting schedule for all frames in the dispensary. ● Adding physical barriers (such as plexiglass or acrylic partitions) at counters and reception desks that are regularly sanitized.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mount plexiglass or plastic shields on to dispensary equipment such as pupilometers, keratometers and slit lamps and ensure that they are regularly sanitized. • Use disposable disinfectant wipes to clean lenses. • Use contactless payment methods such as tap, and discourage cash payments. • Develop a process/system for differentiating sterilized equipment/frames from ones that require sterilization (e.g. colour coding).
<p>Considerations for ROs, staff and patients</p>	<p>In order to comply with Standard 4, opticians must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen all staff members to ensure they do not attend at the workplace if they meet the criteria for self-isolation referred to above. Screening practices should be ongoing to ensure that staff report any changes in their health. • Train staff members on workplace protocols, including hygiene, cleaning and disinfection, and ensure that staff members are provided with adequate resources such as tissues, hand soap, hand sanitizer, disinfectants and/or personal protective equipment (PPE), as appropriate. • Screen all patients/customers before they book an appointment as well as before they enter the dispensary (Point of Care Risk Assessment) using the latest COVID-19 Patient Screening Guidance Document published by the Ministry of Health, with necessary adaptations/modifications to the dispensary environment. <p>For Additional Consideration:</p> <p>In addition, opticians may wish to consider the following additional measures/safeguards, where possible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain Personal Items. Where possible, discourage staff from sharing phones, desks, offices and other tools and equipment. • Maintain a list or record of everyone to whom the optician provides a service in order to carry out follow up care. In addition, opticians should consider keeping records of everyone who comes into the dispensary (including patients as well as any other visitors) for the purposes of “contact tracing” in the event that a probable or confirmed COVID-19 infection is reported in the workplace. • Develop an outbreak procedure in the event that a probable or confirmed infection is reported in the workplace or by a patient who recently attended at the dispensary that covers matters such as cleaning and disinfecting, staffing considerations, and contact tracing. Opticians who are employers or facility operators should ensure that they comply with

	<p>any Occupational Health and Safety requirements regarding written policies for infection control and/or outbreak procedure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace policies. Dispensary owners may consider implementing policies that will prohibit eating/drinking in areas where sterilized lenses, frames or other equipment are processed or handled.
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3. During Dispensing

<p>Considerations for ROs, staff and patients</p>	<p>In light of the risks that continue to be posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, opticians must take steps to protect themselves, patients and staff during the process of dispensing prescription eyewear. In order to comply with Standard 4, opticians must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep apprised of and adhere to, orders and guidelines published by federal, provincial and/or municipal authorities on hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting protocols for healthcare and/or retail settings during the COVID-19 pandemic. • Engage in effective hand hygiene practices after each patient and between tasks, which includes washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using a hand sanitizer that has been approved by Health Canada (DIN or NPN number). • Regularly clean and disinfect common areas and other high-touch surfaces and objects, such as doors, light switches, counter tops, hand rails, keyboards, touch screens and payment pin pads. • Regularly disinfect all equipment, such as pupilometers, lensometers, slit lamps and keratometers, after they have been touched by any staff person or patient. Public Health Ontario recommends using a disinfectant appropriate for a hospital or health care setting, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Alcohol (ethyl or isopropyl) ○ Improved hydrogen peroxide ○ Sodium hypochlorite (bleach) • *Updated May 28, 2021* Clean AND disinfect frame and lenses before and after they have been handled or tried on by a patient or customer. In other words, a two step process must be applied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cleaning: First, items must be cleaned first using any approved cleaner for that particular equipment as per the manufacturer’s instructions (e.g. warm, soapy water). Cleaning refers to the process of removing dirt, grease and other organic material from
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	<p>the surface of an object. Surfaces must be clean in order for disinfectants to work properly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Disinfection: Second, the items must be disinfected using a product approved by Health Canada. The product and method used should reflect the intended use of the items in question, per appropriate public health guidelines (e.g. Public Health Ontario). <p>It is up to the optician to ensure that the cleaning and disinfection products and methods that they use are appropriate to the frame material, having regard to both public health guidelines and manufacturer recommendations. See additional resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintain space or create a barrier. Implement some or all of the following approaches to mitigate risk in the dispensing process. These approaches follow the “hierarchy of hazard controls” stipulated by the Ministry of Health Operational Requirements guidelines, and are in order of importance. These approaches may also be used individually or in combination. It is up to the optician to use their professional judgment to employ a strategy that optimizes safety in the delivery of care to patients: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Elimination and substitution: avoiding having patients physically come into the dispensary by using remote practice and/or physical distancing wherever possible ○ Engineering and system control measures: Installing barriers on equipment and at counters or reception desks, or modifications to ventilation systems ○ Administrative measures: actively screening each patient at time of booking and when they attend for service) and passive screening (signage) ○ Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): use of gloves, surgical masks, gowns, facial/eye protection by the optician ○ Use of non-medical masks or face coverings for services that are provided at a physical distance greater than 2 metres. <p>Additional information and guidelines on these approaches are outlined below.</p>
<p>Initial Contact Lens Fittings</p>	<p>Research continues to be conducted on the risk of transmitting COVID-19 via tear film and/or direct contact with the ocular membrane. In light of this potential risk, the College recommends the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● That the patient be referred to another health care provider where, in the optician’s judgment, the risk level cannot be appropriately mitigated.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That opticians limit the performance of initial contact lens fittings, as fittings typically require close physical contact for a prolonged period of time, and it is generally not possible to use adequate PPE. • Where an initial contact lens fitting is performed, that the optician: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limit close contact: take steps to limit the amount of time that must be spent in close proximity to the patient ○ Optician PPE: ensure use of appropriate PPE in accordance with the Ministry of Health Operational Requirements guidelines for services delivered within 2 metres (i.e. surgical mask), and practice thorough hand hygiene. Face shield and eye protection are also strongly recommended. ○ Patient mask: require the patient to wear a surgical mask. • That physical distancing measures and remote practice be used to the greatest extent possible when delivering continuing care and replacement services to established contact lens patients. • Where a patient requires urgent care at close proximity (e.g. for a dislodged lens), opticians must ensure that they thoroughly wash hands and use appropriate PPE where applicable.
<p>Use of Barriers</p>	<p>Opticians should consider installing barriers (such as plexiglass or plastic shields) on equipment such as pupilometers, keratometers and slit lamps, and at counters or reception desks in order to create an additional safeguard when physical proximity to the patient cannot be avoided.</p> <p>All barriers should be regularly cleaned and sanitized.</p>
<p>Modifications to Ventilation Systems</p>	<p>Certain modifications to ventilation systems may serve as an enhanced infection control mechanism by reducing the likelihood that respiratory droplets are circulated throughout the dispensary environment. Measures such as ensuring proper functioning and adjustment of humidity levels may be considered. In the absence of modifications to ventilation systems, alternative methods of reducing the spread of respiratory droplets can be considered, including use of masks and/or other PPE.</p>
<p>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) use by ROs</p>	<p>Under the Ministry of Health Operational Requirements guidelines, opticians are required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a surgical mask and perform hand hygiene before and after all interactions with and within 2 metres of patients who screen negative. Use of eye protection should also be considered.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use droplet and contact precautions for all interactions with and within 2 metres of patients who screen positive. This includes use of surgical mask, isolation gown, gloves, eye protection, and hand hygiene. It is recommended that opticians defer non-urgent vision care until the patient is well. <p>*Updated May 28, 2021* In addition, other provincial, regional or municipal orders or guidelines may require opticians to wear masks and/or other PPE in other circumstances, including while indoors in areas accessible to the public. Please note that these rules may vary from region to region and are subject to change. Opticians are responsible for regularly reviewing current rules and guidelines.</p> <p>Opticians must use professional judgment in all other circumstances to determine if and when PPE is necessary in order to provide any other service, having regard to the following considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of PPE does not negate the optician’s obligation to engage in the physical distancing, hygiene, cleaning and disinfection protocols outlined above. • It is recommended that PPE be used in conjunction with other approaches set out in the “hierarchy of hazard controls” referred to in the section above (e.g. physical barriers). • The type of PPE that is appropriate will depend on the nature of the interaction or service that is being provided, and may include: surgical masks, N95 respirators, safety glasses/goggles, face shields, or disposable gloves. • PPE should be obtained from a reliable source to ensure that it meets health and safety guidelines. • PPE must be used appropriately in order to be effective. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensuring that appropriate steps are taken when putting on and taking off PPE. ○ Adhering to recommended guidelines on changing and disposing of gloves and masks between patients and when changing tasks
<p>Patient Use of PPE</p>	<p>Ministry of Health Operational Requirements guidelines require health professionals 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.</p> <p>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</p>

	<p>professional judgment to determine whether it is in the patient’s best interest to decline the requested service.</p>
<p>Non-medical masks</p>	<p>The following considerations should be taken into account in regard to the use of non-medical (cloth) masks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Opticians should use professional judgment to consider use of non-medical masks by ROs and staff in the practice setting as a further measure to protect themselves and their patients.
<p>Remote Practice and Physical Distancing Measures</p>	<p>As set out in the Emergency Practice Guidelines published on April 24, 2020, opticians should continue to make best efforts to use remote practice and/or reduce their proximity to patients in the course of dispensing prescription eyewear by using their professional judgment to consider the following steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out consultations by telephone, video conference or email. • Use existing measurement information where available. This may include using the measurements that are already on file for an established patient, working from the patient’s existing frames, or requesting the patient’s consent to contact their previous eyecare provider to obtain a copy of their patient health record. • Consider alternate ways of determining the patient’s measurements while maintaining a safe physical distance. The optician should explain to the patient how this might impact eyewear performance and document this discussion in the patient file. • Limit the selection of frames available to patients, or asking patients to select frames by pointing from a distance or referring to a catalogue. • Ask patients to put on and remove frames themselves whenever possible. • Fit and adapt eyeglasses at a later date, in accordance with existing Delivery Guidelines. The optician should explain to the patient how this might impact eyewear performance and document this discussion in the patient file. • Use “contactless” methods of delivery such as remote delivery (e.g. mail or courier), curbside pickup, or creating a drop off/pick up tray that is sanitized after each use and positioned away from other individuals.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay unnecessary adjustments. The optician should explain to the patient how this might impact eyewear performance and document this discussion in the patient file. • Use “contactless” methods to carry out necessary adjustment, such as using a sanitized drop off/pick up tray to hand the appliance back and forth. • Remote Refills. Dispensing replacement contact lenses to established contact lens patients via remote delivery. • Remote Counselling patients on proper eyeglass and contact lens hygiene practices, including maintenance and cleaning of eyeglasses and contact lenses and cleaning and replacement of eyeglass and contact lens cases. <p>In all cases, the optician should take steps to ensure that the patient comes in for follow up care, as necessary.</p>
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4. Resources	
Ministry of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 Operational Requirements: Health Sector Restart – Ontario Ministry of Health
Returning to Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Managing Health Worker Illness and Return to Work COVID-19” published by the Ontario Ministry of Health
Patient Screening and Workplace Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 Patient Screening Guidance Document – Ontario Ministry of Health • COVID-19 Guidance: Essential Workplaces – Ontario Ministry of Health • Signage for health care settings – Ontario Ministry of Health
Hygiene and Infection Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hand Hygiene Practices in Healthcare Settings” published by the Public Health Agency of Canada • “How to Wash Your Hands” fact sheet published by Public Health Ontario • List of hand sanitizers authorized by Health Canada. • “Best Practices for Environmental Cleaning for Prevention and Control of Infections in All Health Care Settings, 3rd Edition” published by Public Health Ontario • “Best Practices for Prevention, Surveillance and Infection Control Management of Novel Respiratory Infections in All Health Care Settings” published by Public Health Ontario • List of disinfectants authorized by Health Canada

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings published by Public Health Ontario • “Best Practices for Cleaning, Disinfection and Sterilization of Medical Equipment/Devices in All Health Care Settings, 3rd edition” published by Public Health Ontario
Supplying or Finding PPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Ontario Together: help fight coronavirus: Sell medical supplies, find personal protective equipment (PPE), solve problems, or volunteer to help protect against COVID-19” published by the Government of Ontario
Use of PPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Recommended Steps for Putting On and Taking Off Personal Protective Equipment” published by Public Health Ontario • “Putting on Mask and Eye Protection” (video) published by Public Health Ontario • “IPAC Recommendations for Use of Personal Protective Equipment for Care of Individuals with Suspect or Confirmed COVID-19” published by Public Health Ontario • “COVID-19 Guidance: Information on the Use of N95 Filtering Facepiece Respirators Beyond the Manufacturer designated Shelf Life” published by the Ontario Ministry of Health • “Understanding the Difference, Surgical Mask and N95 Respirator” published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention • “Non-medical masks and face coverings: About” published by the Public Health Agency of Canada • “Face coverings and face masks” published by the Ontario Ministry of Health
Occupational Health and Safety requirements for Employers or Facility Operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 Operational Requirements: Health Sector Restart published by the Ontario Ministry of Health