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Media Release

For Immediate Distribution

Optometrists looking out for eye health during COVID-19 outbreak

Restricted services will ease burden in ERs. Some clinics will close for six weeks

Edmonton - Alberta optometry clinics are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic to reduce the spread of infection in the community, and to ensure Albertans continue receiving essential vision care.

Currently, access to optometry services has been restricted to critical services at select clinics across all regions of the province. Other clinics will close entirely for six weeks, as has been recommended by infectious disease experts aiming to flatten the curve and reduce the potential community spread of the COVID-19 outbreak.

“The Alberta College of Optometrists shares our thoughts and well wishes to all Albertans during this challenging time. We offer special condolences to anyone directly impacted by COVID-19 infections among family or friends,” said College President Dr. Nasir Khan.

“We are committed to safeguarding the health and safety of all Albertans, optometrists, and staff during this pandemic,” he said, adding that optometrists can help ease the burden on emergency rooms as Alberta braces for increasing rates of COVID-19 infection - which is expected to continue rising in the weeks to come.

Those optometry clinics that remain open to provide clinically or medically necessary eye exams and treatment will follow strict infection prevention control protocols.

“We are trained and equipped to handle the majority of eye and vision issues that present in the hospital. ERs are going to be overstressed,” Khan said. “Anyone suffering eye or vision issues should contact their local optometrist for appropriate triage, diagnosis, and treatment - before rushing to an ER. Working together, we can help Alberta come through this pandemic.”

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For more information on optometry services during the COVID-19 outbreak contact:

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Optometrists looking out for eye health during COVID-19 outbreak

Background

Optometrists are trained and equipped to handle the majority of eye and vision issues that present in the hospital.

- This includes exams and treatment for patients whose vision could be at risk, and who might suffer further harm and burden the health care system if left untreated.
- Examples of necessary vision care include:
 - Accidents such as trauma to the eye, foreign body in the eye or chemical splash to the eye
 - Red eye with or without any discharge, painful eye
 - Sudden loss of vision, or onset of flashes and/or floaters
 - Sudden onset of double vision or drooping eyelid
 - Sudden changes in prescription, or loss of glasses or contact lenses for people who cannot function without them
 - Patients with very strong prescriptions who break their glasses or run out of contact lenses.

Patients who do present to optometry clinics for vision care services will be asked to observe standard pandemic safety protocols:

- Do not attend any optometry clinic if you are experiencing a fever, cough, sore throat or shortness of breath
- Use hand sanitizer when entering the optometry clinic
- Observe safe distancing from other patients and office staff whenever possible
- Do not allow other family members (who travel with you to your appointment) to enter the clinic – have them stay outside in the car, etc.