



Guiding the Optometric Profession and Protecting the Public since 1921

Important Notice To all Optometrists in Alberta

The current COVID-19 pandemic is creating uncertainty in all health care fields. The Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) has reviewed pandemic models as well as suggested guidelines from other health care organizations. The ACO is committed to safeguarding the health and safety of all Albertans, optometrists and staff during this pandemic crisis, however, we are also committed to ensuring that all Albertans have access to safe and competent vision care services.

Subject matter experts have indicated that a minimum closure of 6 weeks for health care offices is required to make a major difference in the pandemic growth curve. In addition, all health professions have a responsibility to work together so as to not overload emergency rooms with cases that can be diagnosed and treated in community clinics.

With the intention of slowing the growth curve of this pandemic, and especially the potential for community spread, the ACO is requesting that all optometrists make an immediate choice between the following two options:

a) Close your office completely:

- Ensure that your patients have access to emergency eye care services should they need it. These patients can be referred to another optometry or ophthalmology office; however, you should refrain from referring them to an emergency room during this pandemic.
- Acceptable measures include posting a notice on your front door and website as well as having appropriate messaging on your telephone system.
- Identifying one or more individuals who would be responsible for answering telephone messages until your office reopens for patient inquiries and requests from other health care practitioners for patient chart information.

b) Keep your office open; however, restrict patient appointments to necessary visits only:

- The definition of what constitutes a necessary visit is left to the professional discretion of the optometrist. This decision should be based on the patient's medical and visual condition and whether if left undiagnosed and untreated, would cause further harm to your patient and/or a more significant burden to the health care system in the future.

- Follow appropriate infection prevention protocols as listed in previous emails and as detailed in the [ACO Infection Prevention and Control Policy](#); however, we now request that all non-critical surfaces be cleaned with an alcohol or diluted bleach solution rather than a weaker low-level disinfectant.
- Rearrange the furniture and patient flow in your reception area, waiting room and dispensary area to observe appropriate social distancing. Your office could also encourage other family members not being examined to remain outside your clinic (e.g. in their cars) during the appointment.
- Mandate that your staff “triage” your patients when they contact the patient for their reminder telephone call the day before their appointment. If any COVID-19 “red flags” show up during this call, immediately offer to reschedule them to a future date. Further information can be viewed on the [AHS COVID-19 webpage](#).
- Please note that an optometrist does not have to be present in your clinic in order for dispensing of eyeglasses and contact lenses to take place; however, they must be readily available (by telephone for example).

The ACO recommends that each optometrist contact their accountant and legal counsel for advice on potential employee layoffs, Employment Insurance eligibility and other business implications caused by this pandemic. These financial and employment experts will have the latest information on recently announced provincial and Federal assistance programs.

Finally, please be advised that the information contained in this email and the stance taken by the ACO is at this moment in time. Should anything change in the near future, the ACO will be in touch with all members. We will also inform all members when it is considered safe to fully reopen your optometry clinics.

**On behalf of the ACO Council - Stay Safe and
thank you all for doing your part to assist in controlling this crisis.**