

The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) provides advice to patients to support improved patient care and safety. This advice does not define a standard of practice, nor should it be interpreted as legal advice.

Note: The information in this document only applies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What to expect when getting medical care during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our daily routines, including how we receive medical care. Physicians are obligated to follow the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health in the same way as all Albertans. This includes adjusting their patient scheduling, ensuring physical distancing is followed and making sure additional cleaning is completed to keep patients and staff safe.

How a doctor's office runs will change as the pandemic evolves: when there are higher rates of COVID-19 in the community, there will be more restrictions. At those times, Albertans will be encouraged to stay at home, and only patients who have urgent health concerns that cannot be managed through virtual care will be seen in person. The use of virtual care may be an appropriate alternative that does not require the patient to visit the physicians' office in person.

What should I do if I'm scared to get medical care during the pandemic?

If you or someone in your family requires medical attention, it is important to call your doctor's office for advice. If you don't have a family doctor, you can also call Health Link by dialing 811 for help.

Talk to your doctor to come up with a plan to meet your care needs: many concerns can be managed by phone or video so you don't have to go in to the clinic. If you need to access care outside of office hours, urgent care centers and emergency rooms are still open and are following all enhanced cleaning requirements.

Don't delay care for symptoms that could be caused by serious illnesses.

When should I be going in to my doctor's office?

When you call to book an appointment, you will likely be asked screening questions to determine if you have any [COVID-19 symptoms](#). If you do have symptoms of COVID-19, you will be directed to call [Health Link](#) at 811 for testing.

- [Online self-assessment for COVID-19](#)

If the screening questions determine you are not at risk for having COVID-19, the doctor will determine if your health concern can be managed through a phone call, a video conference, or if you need to go to the clinic for an in-person assessment. Generally speaking, most matters will be able to be managed virtually.

It is best to attend your appointment on your own, if possible, but if you need support, be sure to tell the staff this when booking your appointment so they can make arrangements for your support person to attend.

Please note: it is extremely important you are truthful when answering the screening questions, as this will reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 to you, other patients, and the clinic staff.

What about prescriptions?

Your doctor can work with you to call or fax your prescriptions in to your pharmacy so you don't need to visit the clinic unnecessarily.

Physicians and pharmacists have been advised that prescribing untested medications for the treatment for COVID-19 is inappropriate until further research is completed to prove their effectiveness.

Please note: most pharmacists will only dispense up to one month's supply of medication at a time to ensure all patients have access to the medicine they need.

What happens when I arrive?

If you think you might have COVID-19 symptoms the day of your appointment, please call the office for advice **before** you go.

Otherwise, you will be screened for COVID-19 symptoms again when you arrive. Clinics must comply with physical distancing guidelines, so you may notice these things:

COVID-19: Medical Care

- a staff member may take your temperature;
- the furniture in the waiting room may be rearranged to ensure 2m between patients;
- there may be barriers in place to maintain physical distancing; or
- you may be asked to wait in your vehicle until an exam room is available for you.

How do I know the office is clean?

Doctors know about the enhanced cleaning required to prevent the spread of COVID-19. All clinics must keep up with the usual cleaning, plus the additional pandemic requirements. If you aren't sure, don't be afraid to ask the office staff.

Resources

This is a challenging time for everyone, but we are stronger together. CPSA is here to support you and your doctor. If you have any questions, please contact our Standards of Practice Coordinator, Chantelle Dick, at chantelle.dick@cpsa.ab.ca.

We have an Advice to the Profession document on [Reopening Medical Practice](#) which may also give you some helpful information

Alberta Health Services has updates for patients available on their website: [Information for Albertans](#)

Read more about [Alberta's Relaunch Strategy here](#).