



CONSIDERATIONS FOR FAMILY PHYSICIANS: IN-PERSON VISITS WHEN PHONE/VIDEO ISN'T ENOUGH

Many family physicians are asking how to best manage in-person visits when they feel they are clinically necessary. The general advice below is drawn from best-estimated safe practices at the time of writing (March 26, 2020) that consider balancing patient needs with risks of exposure. It is intended as helpful considerations, recognizing that virtual care is already being provided by our fellow family physicians for the majority of our patients' needs.

Ultimately, as family doctors, you are in the best position to determine when an in-person visit with a patient is warranted and safe to do so.

INTRODUCTION

While many of you have appropriately moved your clinics to phone and video appointments – which can be great for things like getting a sense of disease severity, having a look at rashes, possible skin infections, sprains, mental health, etc. – there will be some times when you think your patients need in-person assessment and/or care. Page 2 of this document lists some potential clinical scenarios that may warrant in-person care, along with tips to minimize the risk of infection. As well, this [one-page visual summary](#), adapted for the Ontario context from a recent [BMJ article](#), provides a quick guide to a virtual "respiratory" consultation.

Family physicians have raised questions about the potential of asymptomatic transmission of COVID-19 through an in-person visit. While there are ways to minimize risk, as noted on page 2, the ongoing shortage of PPE in particular is an issue that the OCFP and our partners have been raising repeatedly. At the present time, full PPE is not routine practice for non-infectious illnesses but a surgical mask and gloves/hand hygiene is likely best practice, especially in regions with suspected community spread. If your clinic is (hopefully temporarily) not able to offer in-person care, some family physicians are looking to their local colleagues and primary care providers to pool resources.

We would love to hear your innovative solutions to managing your practices in this challenging time, so please share your stories with us. And please let us know the information you need from us to help you best care for your patients and your practice.

Questions? Email ocfp@ocfp.on.ca

For more information visit: ontariofamilyphysicians.ca/covid19

WHEN PHONE/VIDEO ISN'T ENOUGH: PRACTICE TIPS FOR IN-OFFICE ASSESSMENTS

- ✓ Screen for COVID – both passively with signage and actively with questions on the phone, or on your web-based booking, and when patients present to the clinic
- ✓ Consider having the patient call from outside the clinic (e.g., in car, waiting at a distance) once arrived and put in a room when available, trying to avoid time spent in the waiting room
- ✓ Scan health cards or identification visually (i.e., “hands free”)
- ✓ Interact with your staff at a 2-metre distance and wash hands frequently, keeping your hands to yourself!
- ✓ Space chairs in waiting room 2 metres apart and remove extra objects in waiting room
- ✓ Space your appointments to try to avoid any need for a wait in the waiting room
- ✓ Minimize people entering with the patient
- ✓ Use minimal number of rooms and clear rooms of extraneous objects and/or cover up the things that you can't move like wall mounted ophthalmoscopes
- ✓ Keep direct patient contact to the physician, so that all vitals are done by the MD as necessary
- ✓ In-person visits are generally for exams, so have patients move directly to the exam table/beds
- ✓ Keep distance until exam, and use available PPE at your office (gloves, surgical masks and eye protection)
- ✓ Clean surfaces after the patient leaves.

SAMPLE CLINICAL SCENARIOS

Non-infectious complaints of an acute nature, such as neurological complaints, lacerations/incision and drainage, abdominal pain, gynecological disorders, or potential exacerbation of a chronic condition (like COPD or heart failure). If you feel your virtual consult is not adequate and an assessment cannot wait weeks, book an in-person appointment.



Prenatal/Immunizations: St. Michael's Hospital has developed a proposed interim schedule for well-child and low-risk prenatal visits during the COVID-19 pandemic, available as a visual [here](#). You can read the full article [here](#).



Allergy Shots: Suggest continuation for only those severely affected.



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