

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.

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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 office hours, urgent care centres 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. Health Canada has provided information on [going out safely during COVID-19](#). Medical appointments are considered medium risk.

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 or video conference, or if you need to go to the clinic for an in-person assessment. Generally speaking, most matters may 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 office staff 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 prescription refills?

Your doctor can work with you to call or fax your prescription refills 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.

Do I have to wear a mask?

You may be asked to wear a mask when going in to your doctor's office. In fact, wearing a mask in public places may be the law depending on what city or town you are in. It is important for you to be aware of what is required when you are in public spaces. This helps protect you, other patients, the office staff and your doctor. If you do not have a mask, your doctor's office may provide you with one. Depending on the availability of supplies, you may be asked to pay a small fee for your mask. You can find information on the [Masks for Albertans Program here](#).

What if I can't wear a mask?

If you are unable to wear a mask for health or other reasons, the healthcare team should work with you to find a safe solution.

In some circumstances, you may be asked to leave the clinic if you refuse to wear a mask, but this will depend on the urgency of your care needs—you should not be refused care in an emergency. However, you may be asked to reschedule your appointment and/or attend a virtual care appointment if you refuse to wear a mask.

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 some or all of these measures:

- a staff member may take your temperature
- the furniture in the waiting room may be rearranged to ensure 2 metres between patients
- there may be barriers in place to maintain physical distancing
- 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.

Can I get a doctor's note so I don't have to wear a mask?

The Chief Medical Officer of Health still [strongly recommends you wear a mask in public](#) to protect both yourself and the people around you. As well, depending on the city or town you are in, masks may be mandatory in public spaces.

Doctors are not expected to write notes exempting people from wearing masks unless you fall into one of the [identified categories at risk for wearing a mask](#)—children under two years of age, people who are unable to remove masks without assistance or those with trouble breathing. Talk to your doctor: based on your medical history, your doctor will know if you are part of a risk category.

If your doctor decides it is medically necessary for you to be exempt from wearing a mask, they **may** opt to provide you with a note. However, if you do not fall into one of the identified risk categories, your doctor is **not** obligated to provide you with a note saying you don't have to wear a mask in public.

Please be aware that you will have to pay a fee for a doctor's note, as this is [not a service covered](#) under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan.

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.](#)