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COUNCIL FOR HEALTHY EYES CANADA (CHEC)

Covid-19 Toolkit for Optometrists

Council for Healthy Eyes Canada (CHEC) Optometrist Toolkit resources are developed and made available through the collaborative partnerships between the vision industry and eye care professionals

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Introduction

To help reduce the spread of Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19 or SARS-COV-2) and support social distancing, many Optometrists have shuttered offices and are shifting to remote/virtual services to continue caring for patients during the pandemic. This has changed how you care for patients during the lockdown, and as restrictions are lifted will continue to impact how you operate on daily basis to ensure the safety of patients and all Canadians.

This document contains practical information for Canadian Optometrists related to the Covid-19 pandemic and virtual resources to consider for your practice. We have curated information from various sources including Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada (FORAC), Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) and various provincial associations.

As we all continue to navigate this ever-changing situation, we hope you find this toolkit and other resources developed by the Council for Healthy Eyes Canada (CHEC) helpful. Our goal to provide you with useful resources is made possible through the collaborations and relationships we've developed and continue to expand.

CHEC is grateful for the support from industry partners like Alcon, Essilor, Johnson and Johnson, Nikon and Shamir.

The Council for Healthy Eyes Canada (CHEC) very much appreciates ongoing leadership from our industry partners in helping to found the highly successful ThinkAboutYourEyes.ca (TAYE) integrated marketing, communications and data collection campaign. We also would like to thank Canadian eye care professionals such as Optometrists at this very challenging time.

The Alcon logo consists of the word "Alcon" in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

About us

Organized as a collaboration between eye care professionals and industry, CHEC is a registered not-for-profit organization that is dedicated to improving eye health for Canadians through awareness and education initiatives. Through strategic partnerships and the guidance of our representative Board, we aim to increase awareness and eye care intentions of Canadians from coast to coast, subsequently leading to an uplift in the number of eye exams and vision treatments across the country.

ThinkAboutYourEyes.ca (TAYE) is a bilingual (English and French) integrated marketing, communications and data collection campaign organized annually by CHEC, which has increased foot traffic to Canadian Optometrists by well-over five percent (5%) each year and has successfully reached millions of Canadians since its launch in 2018. TAYE is a collaborative effort that is designed to educate the public about the benefits of vision health and promote the importance of annual comprehensive eye exams.

To learn more, visit:

<https://www.thinkaboutyoureyes.ca/>

<http://councilforhealthyeyes.ca/>

Disclaimer

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Putting patients first

How businesses respond during this pandemic can influence how they are remembered down the road. Delivering great customer experiences has become infinitely more complex and important during this time, as circumstances change rapidly and emotions run high. The best thing you can do is take a human-centric approach and focus on how you can help your patients and others.

During the pandemic considerations

This is new territory for everyone, and nobody has all the answers. Listen to your patients and what they feel comfortable with to help you continue to provide exceptional care. Here are some ways you can be proactive to let patients know you have their best interests in mind.

Best practices

- **Share information.** Clearly communicate service offerings, hours of operation, contact info and onsite protocol to your patients. Post signage in your window(s) or at entrances, update online listings and voicemail. Consider email communication if you have contact info and consent.
- **Reach out.** Block time each day to call and check in on your most vulnerable patients. This old-school approach to patient care goes a long way.
- **Practice empathy.** Be mindful of patient anxiety and assure them they are in good hands. Let them know how to reach out if they have questions or concerns.

Post-pandemic considerations

When we open back up for business, the world we will return to is still unknown and may be permanently impacted by the realities brought to light during the pandemic. We expect that there will be an uptick in awareness around personal health that will include eye health.

As social distancing restrictions are lifted, patients may be apprehensive about being in public spaces. You will need to pay extra attention to making patients feel comfortable in your practice. When your practice reopens to in-person examinations, continue to follow vigilant cleaning rituals and social distancing recommendations as set out by provincial and federal authorities.

Dealing with upset customers

Especially during emotionally turbulent times, when staff are under more pressure than ever, it can be difficult to remain calm while dealing with an unforeseen issue. If you haven't already done so, consider basic training and escalation protocol for dealing with angry, upset or scared patients.

Key considerations

1. **Listen first.** Sometimes patients just need to feel heard and understood.
2. **Channel empathy.** Try to understand their perspective and reasons behind the feelings.
3. **Avoid arguing.** Let them voice their concerns and remind them you're there to help.
4. **Set boundaries.** If things escalate to a point where you feel unsafe, politely end the conversation.

Virtual Practice

One of the most notable trends emerging with Covid-19 has been the shift to virtual business operations which impacts both team management and patient care.

Team collaboration

It's important to do what you can to keep staff informed about changes to your business, and to also to keep them motivated and on task.

Collaboration and communication tools go a long way, especially those that allow you to connect in meaningful and immediate ways – one-on-one and as a group.

First and foremost, consider how existing tools can be repurposed. For example, if you're already subscribed to [Office 365™](#), you may have access to [Microsoft Teams™](#) which includes video and messenger services.

- **Video:** A little bit of face time goes a long way to making staff feel connected and comfortable. Zoom™ is currently the most popular video conferencing option, with free options and is relatively easy to use. Here are a handful of resources to get you started:

- **Webinar:** [Zoom Meetings for Healthcare](#) (<60 minutes)
- **Blog:** Using [Zoom for Telehealth & Virtual Care](#) (1,150 words)
- **Zoom** for [Healthcare Brochure](#) (2 pages)

- **Instant messaging:** Quick and nimble communication amongst team members is essential for a productive virtual office. Most important are visibility and keeping inbox clutter to a minimum. [Slack](#) is currently the most popular messaging platform and has a free option for small teams.

Supporting patients with teleoptometry

Many Optometrists are using technology to provide eye health and vision care to support patients. The below information is intended to help should you pursue this route.

Regulatory guidelines

Teleoptometry is generally encouraged by Canadian regulators provided precautions are taken to ensure quality of care and protection of patient information.

The Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada ([FORAC Policy on Teleoptometry](#)) outlines standard business practices plus a handful of teleoptometry considerations, such as:

- Ensure digital health information is appropriately stored and protected.
- Comply with relevant legislation and regulatory policies as it applies to current and evolving technologies used in teleoptometry.

Provincial associations with teleoptometry policies can be found here:

- [Alberta College of Optometrists' Clinical Practice Guideline for Telehealth](#);
- [College of Optometrists of British Columbia Teleoptometry Policy](#);
- [Nova Scotia College of Optometrists Policy on Teleoptometry](#);
- [Ontario Telehealth Policy for Optometrists](#); and,
- [Saskatchewan Association of Optometrists' Teleoptometry Standards of Practice](#).

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) defers to provincial and the previously mentioned FORAC policy if provincial guidance is not available. The [CAO Statement on Teleoptometry](#) also recommends that Optometrists should:

- Purchase cybersecurity insurance;
- Ensure professional liability insurance covers teleoptometry; and,
- Implement secure patient communications. (i.e. email encryption, secure file exchange)

Teleoptometry options

The [CAO Teleoptometry During Covid-19 Guide](#) provides detailed information to help Optometrists set-up a virtual practice. Options summarized within this section aims to help you make technology decisions based on the needs of your business, patients and employees.

Telephone and email

While telephone and email are easiest, keep in mind that neither phone or email are PIPEDA or HIPAA compliant for teleoptometry.

Secure online portals

Various online portals offer secure video, correspondence and other built-in features designed to support patient and practitioner needs. Below is a summary of such services.

Method	Eyecare Live Portal	LiveCare Portal	Doxy.me Telemedicine	Zoom for Healthcare	Vidyo for Telehealth	Poly Solutions for Healthcare	VSee Telehealth
Security	HIPAA compliant	Secure end-to-end encryption of messages	HIPAA, GDPR, PHIPA/PIPEDA, & HITECH compliant	HIPAA and PIPEDA/PHIPA compliant	HIPAA compliant	HIPAA compliant	HIPAA compliant
Cost	Monthly fees TBD; \$750 (USD) onboarding fee waived	\$50 - \$150 (CAD) per month	Free for basic option (video calling only); \$35-\$50/month (USD) for premium options	\$200 (USD) per month per account	Contact sales team	\$1,000 - \$3,000 (USD) for videoconferencing products	\$50 (USD) per month for a basic account; custom pricing for an enterprise account
How it Works	App based experience	Web based experience	Web based experience (ex. doxy.me/YourDrsName)	Web or app-based experience, like Zoom	Contact sales team	Contact sales team	Web or app-based experience
Video Calling	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Sending and receiving messages	•	•	•		•		•
Reminders and notifications	•	•	•				•
Online waiting rooms		•	•	•	•		•
Screen sharing			•	•	•	•	•
File sharing (photos, videos, documents)	•	•	•			•	•
File annotation				•			•
EMR and healthcare application integration (ex. Epic, Strmr, Intake Q, Practice Better, Cerner, etc.)	•	•		•	•	•	
Prescribing prescriptions	•	•					•
Payment integration	•	•	•				•
Diagnostic tool integration (ex. digital stethoscopes, point of care cameras, far end PTZ camera control, etc.)	•	•		•	•	•	•
Vision/Eye Test integration (Acuity and Dry Eye SPEED tests, etc.)	•						
Reporting Capabilities	•						
Shortcomings	Lack of some useful features such as screen sharing and online waiting rooms.	Many of the features, such as Live Diagnostic Video and other medical device integrations, require the telehealth stations, which aren't practical given social distancing directives.	No EMR or diagnostic tool integration – PHI is not saved in this platform. No data is saved from meetings. Many of the features, such as screen sharing and file transfers require a premium account.	Higher ongoing costs every month compared to other telehealth solutions. Set-up and registration may also be more difficult for patients and doctors compared to other options.	Lack of publicly available information. Requires connecting with a sales associate and study suggests Vidyo difficult to set up and access for patients.	Very high costs compared to other options. Lack of publicly available information requires meeting with sales team to get up and running. Patients may have trouble logging in according to a study .	Lack of EMR integration. Many of the features, such as screensharing, annotation, payment integration and more require the custom enterprise account.

Practicing safe urgent care

To limit contact between patients and staff in facilities, it's best to only see patients for urgent issues. If your facilities are still open, ensure that your patients are screened for COVID-19 in advance.

Although there is no precise definition of what constitutes urgent care, the [Ontario College of Optometry](#) defines it as "any issue that could be vision-threatening, based on symptoms, conditions, patient history, or injury."

Use your best clinical judgement when deciding if and how to pursue potential urgent cases. Staff and patient safety should be your primary concern. In cases where you are not able to serve urgent care patients, they should be referred to another optometrist, ophthalmologist or the nearest emergency room as appropriate.

Screening for Covid-19

If your facility is open to the public, it's important to check staff for symptoms every day.

Screening protocol

To minimize social contact with patients, use a telephone or video triage system to determine whether a patient needs to be seen in person.

If possible, check the temperature of onsite visitors using a contactless thermometer. Also, ask staff and patients to confirm they have no new coughing, shortness of breath or conjunctivitis which can be symptoms of Covid-19.

Referral protocol

For patients who potentially have Covid-19, call the practitioner or hospital where the patient is being referred so the health care team can be given notice of the urgency of the eye health issue and the respiratory infection.

Onsite protocol

Always consider ways to limit onsite individuals. See patients by appointment only, and only those who have urgent issues. Do not see patients for routine eye exams.

Additionally, take extra precautions:

- **Wash hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds** upon arrival, before/after each patient, before/after eating and before/after using any shared facilities or devices.

- **Use >70% alcohol-based hand sanitizer** regularly if you have access to it and clean all equipment with best available disinfectant (e.g. diluted bleach or alcohol solution)
- **Minimize sharing equipment** and disinfect phones or computers in-between uses.
- **Maintain social distancing** amongst staff/patients. Limit number of patients in waiting room, space out chairs and consider asking patients to wait outside facility until it's their turn.
- **Masks should be worn** by all staff within two meters of patients and any patients with signs of respiratory infection.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Only provide in-person urgent care if you have access to PPE. If you're receiving urgent care patients, it's imperative that proper [donning and doffing procedures](#) are followed to keep everyone safe.

The BC Centre for Disease Control has developed two handy guides that can be printed and posted as office reminders for staff who are in direct contact with patients:

- [Five steps to put on PPE](#); and,
- [Nine steps to take off PPE](#).

PPE conservation

Due to the shortage of PPE worldwide, essential workers are being encouraged to prolong use of protective masks, gowns and eyewear when appropriate. If you exercise this approach, avoid touching, removing and resituating PPE to prevent cross-contamination.

As a best practice, prolonged wear of PPE should not exceed four hours and prolonged use of gloves is never recommended, replace them regularly and wash hands frequently.

PPE donations

If you have access to personal protective equipment and are not seeing patients in person, consider donating your equipment to a local hospital.

Covid-19 in Canada

Canadian sentiment and trends

Canadians are expressing mixed and changing feelings as COVID-19 progresses. Now more than ever, Canadians have a critical role to maintain social distancing as the government engages in conversation regarding when, and how, segments of the economy can be reopened.

- Nearly [5.4 million Canadians](#) are receiving emergency federal aid from the government, with **hundreds of thousands more claims waiting to be processed**;
- In Canada, the federal and provincial governments are [beginning discussions](#) about reopening the economy in phases, with the expectation that **current restrictions will stay in place for several weeks to maintain progress**;
- The debate about [when normalcy can resume](#) continues, **building on the successful measures to social distance and flatten the curve in Canada**;
- Even as calls for normalcy increase, a recent [Angus Reid poll](#) reports **77 per cent** of Canadians say it is **too soon to begin relaxing social distancing** requirements and business closures. Additionally, **41 per cent of Canadians** believe it will be **3-6 months before things will be “back to normal”** in Canada and **43 per cent** say they believe it will be **more than six months**;
- When it comes to the work from home experience, [Leger and the Association of Canadian Studies](#) found that **50 per cent of Canadians are working from home** and **79 per cent** of them report that they are having a positive experience; and,
- **Sentiments around the healthcare system** show that **49 per cent** of Canadians are [concerned that the healthcare system in their community can handle the pandemic](#), down from **69 per cent** the week of March 30th.

Optometry community in Canada

During such unprecedented times, it's wonderful to see a universal sense of care and camaraderie emerge among optometrists across Canada. Below are a few examples of individuals and organizations in our industry who are stepping up to make a difference.

Individual efforts in the community

In a short period of time, many eye care professionals within our community have made a positive impact on the lives of Canadians. Below are some examples that may be valuable for your practice to implement or for you to share with your patients:

- **Edmonton optometrist, Sarah Keep** and her husband, [saw an opportunity to give back to the community during the pandemic](#) and manufactured and donated 150 protective masks to optometry clinics.
- **Dr. Nasir Khan, president of the Alberta College of Optometrists**, has made a few media appearances expressing his thought leadership during the pandemic. Khan has spoken to [encouraging optometry offices to remain open](#) in order to reduce the impact on emergency rooms and [communicated strict infection and prevention controls](#).
- **Canadian optometrist, Dr. Rob Kloepfer**, takes pride in [educating the public](#) about eye care through lectures and public appearances. Recently, [he called out parents](#) when stating the importance of frequent eyeglasses cleaning, handwashing before contact lens use, and avoiding sharing eye drops in households to avoid the spread of the coronavirus.
- **Dr. Weslie Hamada, O.D. FAAO, LensCrafters** shared that, despite not being able to give up our screens during this unfortunate time, there are some very [simple steps we can take to protect our vision](#).
- **University of Waterloo optometry student, Cindy Shan**, wrote an article about how [optometrists and other health professionals can talk to patients](#) about their mental health during the pandemic. Shan emphasized that there is [more to helping patients](#) than completing an eye exam, when urging optometrists to support the overall wellbeing of their patients.

Organizations leading by example

- Proper eye care and access to vision correction is still essential during a pandemic. Below are examples of how some organizations are addressing health and safety concerns and continuing to meet the demand for corrective lenswear. **Clearly™** updated their followers on [Instagram™](#) and [Twitter™](#) on how the company has been operating during COVID-19. Other actions on social include:
 - Sharing tips to ensure a successful transition to working from home, encouraging people to share their tips in the comments;
 - Their [donation of safety glasses to the healthcare heroes](#) at Vancouver Coastal Health; and,
 - Reminders to [take a few minutes away from the screen](#) for your eyes and spirits.
- **Nikon Lenswear** posted on Facebook™ an announcement on how it is working to maintain their level of standards during COVID-19. Other actions on social include:
 - Sharing an eyesight routine to relax, your eyes, body and mind;
 - Posts directed at considering different lenses for this new normal such as E-life Neo for increased screen time; and
 - Sharing a message of support and reminding people to enjoy the moments with their families during this time.
- **Essilor™** posted on [Facebook™](#) announcing how it is operating during COVID-19. Other actions on social include:
 - Sharing [tips to limit the impact of long work hours](#) on your eyes;
 - Posts directed at eyecare professionals announcing that Essilor Academy is [offering micro-trainings for the next four weeks](#) on a variety of business subjects; and,
 - Sharing [appreciation for essential employees](#) that are working at the office/labs to help customers/patients.
- **Alcon** has a [dedicated page](#) on their Website detailing how / they've implemented new measures during this time for their associates, ensuring critical supply and promoting the safe use of their products. Other actions include:
 - Posting safe handling tips on their social channels regarding proper [hand washing](#) for contact care; and
 - [Offering free shipping](#) on all contact orders to ensure vision isn't impacted.
- **College of Optometrists of Ontario** includes a "[Find Urgent Eye Care](#)" section on their website, along with postings providing [relevant information for patients](#) and updates for optometrists. Other actions on social include:
 - [Facebook post](#) providing updates on urgent care during COVID-19 and how those with vision issues can search the Public Register using two new search fields.
- **Johnson & Johnson Vision** [posted on their website](#) highlighting J&J Vision's response to COVID-19 which includes taking comfort in ACUVUE, continued patient care and prioritizing safety at every level. Other actions on social include:
 - Encouraging everyone, including contact lens wearers, to [follow CDC guidance](#) and avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. A [link to ACUVUE's steps](#) for cleaning contact lenses has also been shared;
 - Announcing the measures J&J has taken to [maintain its supply chain](#) operations during COVID-19 along with a [\\$50 million commitment to support frontline health workers](#) battling COVID-19;
 - Highlighting lead vaccine candidate for COVID-19, landmark new partnership with U.S. department of Health & Human Services and [commitment to supply one billion vaccines worldwide](#) for emergency pandemic use; and,
 - Reminding of best [practices such as the 20/20/20 rule](#). Encouraging people working from home to practice taking 20 seconds to look at least 20 feet away every 20 minutes.
- **Indigo's Love of Reading Foundation** committed [\\$1 million in books and educational resources](#) to support Canadian children in need during the pandemic.

Covid-19 Resources

- **The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC)** is a reliable source of useful information regarding the situation in Ontario. The MOHLTC provides information and updates for healthcare professionals on their website: www.health.gov.on.ca/index.html;
- **Health care professionals can refer to [the Interim National Surveillance Guidelines for Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#)**, to aid with the detection and reporting of COVID-19 in Canada.
- **The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO)** has developed an 'Information for Members on Coronavirus (COVID-19)' one-pager, accessible [here](#);
- **COVID-19 CDC Guidance** provides guidelines for [regular eye exams](#);
- **Facebook** [launched a tool](#) that will notify users if they have come across any COVID-19 misinformation, in a bid to prevent the spread of false information;
- **Apple** launched a [website](#) and a [new app](#) dedicated to COVID-19 screening. The resources offer an online screening tool, information about the disease, and some guidance on when to seek testing or emergency care; and,
- **Shopify** launched a new initiative that [challenges teams](#) within its partner network to build apps to help businesses adapt and grow online during the COVID-19 crisis.

Optometrist associations



THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS
<https://opto.ca/>



NOVA SCOTIA
<https://www.nsoptometrists.ca/index.html> OR <https://nsco.ca/>



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