



April 30th, 2020

Guidelines – Return to Work

The Newfoundland and Labrador College of Optometrists recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic is a difficult situation for its members. Recent government talks regarding a phased approach to easing of restrictions has led the college to develop guidelines for optometrists of the province to return to work.

The NLCO also advises each member to review their own policies in addition to these guidelines to ensure a safe and effective return to work plan. Provincial and federal governments and health authorities may also announce their own policies which may include physical distancing, proper use of PPE and infection control guidelines. All members should stay current with all health related updates from the college and government orders.

General Precautionary and Screening Measures

- Prior to entering the clinic, patients and staff should self-declare the status of their health. Patients must be asked if they have traveled outside of the province in the last 14 days, have any cold or flu-like symptoms or have been asked to self-isolate. Proper signage should also be placed at the clinic entrance alerting those entering the clinic who have not been contacted.
- Optometrists and staff should not serve any patients in the clinic who do not meet the screening criteria outlined above. They should be directed to the appropriate health care provider and advised to call 811 for further information.
- Should an Optometrist or member of staff fail the screening criteria they should be sent home to self isolate and contact a health official and dial 811 to report their symptoms.
- Care must be taken to practice physical distancing with staff and patients. Controlled entry and exit, spacing waiting area chairs 2m apart, extending time between appointments and limiting or expediting dispensing along with prompt, disinfection of any frames, equipment, or measuring devices etc used in between patients.

Precautionary Measure for Optometrists & Staff

- All optometrists and staff must wash/disinfect their hands upon entering the clinic.
- When possible, personal items that can contribute to the spread of COVID-19 should not enter the workplace. This can include but is not limited to reusable lunch containers, jewelry, scarves, bags, backpacks and reusable drink containers. Everyone should consider wearing attire that can be easily washed upon returning home after work. Physical distancing between staff members and patients must be taken into consideration at all times when possible. This may involve removing some chairs from waiting areas, spacing out appointments, staggering break times and working to minimize interactions between staff members and patients.
- Sharing workstations should be avoided and common touch points should be disinfected regularly (doorknobs, counters, keyboards, phones, pens etc.). Waiting room material should be removed such as magazines, children's toys, remote controls and other electronics.

Precautionary Measure for Patients and the Public

- Patient volumes must be managed to maintaining physical distancing and minimize wait times. Patients should provide as much detail as possible over the phone prior to entering the clinic to help reduce times spent in-office.
- Patients must be instructed to wear a face mask or covering for their nose and mouth from the time they enter the clinic until the time they leave.
- Patients must wash or sanitize their hands up entering the clinic.
- Patients should be advised that only those scheduled for an appointment or in need of service should be allowed to enter the building. Those accompanying them should wait outside or in their vehicle unless absolutely necessary (parent of child, mobility aide, translator).

Physical Examination of the Eyes

- Optometrists should follow the COS guidelines when conducting an ocular health exam. The document is attached and can also be downloaded at https://www.cosprc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guidelines-for-Ophthalmic-Care_March_19_12PM-ef-1.pdf
- Optometrists must wear appropriate PPE during the course of an examination and adhere to strict disinfection protocols of equipment and surrounding areas.

Pretesting/Auxiliary Testing

- Staff and doctors must wear appropriate PPE throughout all patient encounters.
- All equipment must be disinfected after each use.
- Non-contact tonometry may not be preformed at this time (alternatives include iCare, applanation tonometry and tonopen).
- At this time, full threshold visual fields (i.e.: Zeiss/Humphrey/Octopus/Medmont) may be conducted for emergency cases only, as the interior of the bowl is not able to be disinfected without damaging the instrument. If this procedure is deemed necessary, patients must wear a mask and the staff member or optometrist must wear appropriate PPE and limit the amount of time spent near the patient as much as possible

Glasses Dispensing

- New glasses may be fitted, observing proper use of PPE during the encounter. Frames must be cleaned and sanitized immediately after contact by each patient, before being placed back on display. Efficiency in frame and lens selection is strongly encouraged to minimize the length of time of the encounter.
- Adjustments and repairs may be made to a patient's personal frames however frames should be sanitized prior to making the adjustment/repair and tools must be sanitized after use (hands must be washed/sanitized, or gloves donned/doffed immediately before and after handling the patient's glasses).
- Consider booking appointments for dispensing glasses and repairs.

Contact Lens Training

- Due to extended periods of close contact with patients and repeated touching of the face and eyes, routine contact lens training may not be done at this time.

PPE

- Masks (surgical, KN95, or N95) must be worn at any time that physical distancing from others cannot be maintained. One mask may be used for an entire work shift.
- Eye protection must be worn (goggles, full coverage safety glasses or face shield) when physical distancing cannot be followed.
- Single use latex or nitrile gloves may be used, once only, in a single patient encounter. If not using gloves, hands must be washed or sanitized immediately before and after any patient encounter.
- At this time, gowns are not required in an outpatient setting unless the patient is COVID positive or has respiratory symptoms.

Disinfection Guidelines for Optometric devices

- Doctors and staff are instructed to follow the Canadian Association of Optometrists guidelines on approved disinfection available on their website.