



The Practice of Teleoptometry during the COVID-19 Emergency

The Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada (FORAC) defines teleoptometry as **“the provision of vision and eye health services that are delivered within the scope of practice of optometry using electronic health information, medical and communication technologies, and where the provider and patient are separated by remote distance.”**

As COVID-19 continues to spread across Canada, optometrists are being encouraged by provincial health authorities to restrict or halt non-urgent patient care. This is resulting in greater interest in teleoptometry and the ability of optometrists to use it in the practice setting. The Colleges of Optometrists of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec have published guidelines on the practice of teleoptometry in their respective jurisdictions, but they vary.

Currently, there is no pan-Canadian convention on what specifically constitutes non-urgent care in optometry.

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) encourages any optometrist considering offering non-urgent patient care through teleoptometry to **first consult her or his respective provincial college for specific and up-to-date guidelines.**

The CAO also encourages optometrists to consider the following factors:

- Whether or not they can offer the same level of care through teleoptometry as they would in the clinic;
- Whether or not they can safeguard patient privacy in their communication with patients and/or other healthcare providers;
- Whether or not their communications with patients are fully protected (e.g. encrypted emails and file attachments);
- Whether or not they have the ability to maintain patient records from a teleoptometric visit;
- Whether or not equipment used remotely provides the same level of accuracy and reliability as in-clinic apparatus;
- Whether or not they can positively identify themselves to the patient and they can obtain a positive patient identification prior to offering the service;
- Whether or not teleoptometric services are covered through public insurance where applicable.

Currently, most provinces do not cover teleoptometry. The CAO will keep monitoring this and will update this information appropriately.

- Whether or not the services are reimbursable by private insurance plans where applicable and communicating that clearly to the patient ahead of the consultation;
- Whether they have appropriate licensing and liability insurance if rendering care to out of province patients;
- Whether they have liability insurance that specifically covers teleoptometry.