

BRIEFING NOTE

TO: The Board of Directors

FROM: Clinical Practice Committee

DATE: October 2, 2023

SUBJECT: 8.0 COVID-19 Practice Guidelines & Standard 4

☒ For Decision ☐ For Information ☐ Monitoring Report

Purpose:

To determine whether to retire the COVID-19 Practice Guidelines and/or approve proposed amendments to Standard 4.

Background

COVID-19 Practice Guidelines

The COVID-19 Practice Guidelines were intended as a temporary measure to reduce risk to opticians and patients while delivering services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidelines were updated regularly based on Ministry of Health Directives and are specific to safety and infection control during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The latest edition, COVID-19 Practice Guidelines came into effect June 11, 2022. The guidelines distinguish between requirements and recommendations and emphasize opticians' continued responsibility to ensure a safe practice environment.

Standards of Practice and Practice Guidelines

The Standards of Practice set out the expectation for every optician. When dispensing eyewear, an optician must take full responsibility for meeting these standards and ensuring that the patient's best interests are met.

Standard 4: Safety and Infection Control in the Practice Environment provides criteria and guidelines around safety and infection control in the workplace. This standard states that opticians shall ensure that procedures are in place, to ensure the health and safety for both patients and staff and provides the criteria they are required to follow.

For Consideration

In light of the fact that all COVID-19 Public Health Orders have been lifted by the Ministry of Health and the risk level with respect to COVID-19 has significantly declined, the Clinical Practice Committee recommends that the Board retire the COVID-19 Practice Guidelines.

In lieu of a standalone guideline specific to COVID-19, the Committee recommends that Standard 4: Safety and Infection Control in the Practice Environment be updated and/or a new guideline be introduced that would address general requirements for safety and infection control in the event of public health emergencies or other circumstances of increased risk. These updates would address:

- Criteria related to infectious disease outbreaks
- Guidance around infectious disease outbreaks
- Guidance around cleaning and disinfecting frames and lenses

The COVID-19 Practice Guidelines are attached as Appendix A and a draft of the proposed updates to Standard 4 are attached as Appendix B.

Public Interest Considerations:

Having criteria related to infectious disease outbreaks and guidelines specific to safety and infection control will provide opticians with additional guidance to ensure they are practicing safely.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Considerations:

The Board should consider whether the updates to the standard and guidelines are accessible to all opticians and patients and whether they account for the needs of different patients.

Recommendations/Action Required:

The Clinical Practice Committee recommends that the Board:

1. Retire the COVID-19 Practice Guidelines.
2. Approve proposed updates to Standard 4: Safety and Infection Control in the Practice Environment.

COVID-19 Practice Guidelines for Registered Opticians

The following Practice Guidelines, which are effective on June 11, 2022, apply to all Registered Opticians in Ontario. These Guidelines are to be read in conjunction with **Standard 4 of the [Standards of Practice: Safety and Infection Control in the Practice Environment](#)**, as well as any directives, regulations or orders issued by the Ministry of Health or other public health authorities.

Under Standard 4, opticians must take reasonable and appropriate measures to minimize the risk of contamination and subsequent transmission of infectious agents within the practice environment. The purpose of these Guidelines is to provide information that will help opticians meet this Standard in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The College recognizes that there are many differences between practice environments, and that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. For that reason, these Guidelines have been drafted broadly to accommodate these differences while emphasizing the need for registrants to keep health and safety considerations paramount.

These Guidelines distinguish between **requirements** and **recommendations**. Opticians are expected to comply with the requirements set out in these Guidelines. The recommendations in these Guidelines identify best practices and measures that will enhance infection control. While it is not mandatory to implement any specific recommendation, opticians are reminded that they remain responsible for demonstrating that they have taken steps to ensure a safe practice environment.

Opticians that employ others or operate a health facility must also familiarize themselves with their obligations under Occupational Health and Safety legislation, and should consult a qualified legal professional for guidance.

These Guidelines will be updated continually as new information becomes available. Please review these Guidelines on a regular basis to ensure currency.

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1. Requirements

This section sets out the **requirements** that opticians must adhere to in order to comply with Standard 4 of the Standards of Practice.

Public Health and Emergency Orders	<p>Opticians must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comply with any federal, provincial, regional or municipal orders, laws, by-laws, directives or guidance relating to public health or emergency orders, including requirements relating to capacity limits, patient screening, masks, and/or hour restrictions.
Self-Screening and Isolating	<p>Opticians must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in regular self-screening to assess their risk level for COVID-19 infection and transmission and monitor for potential symptoms (including fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat or runny nose). • Refrain from close contact with patients if you test positive for, experience symptoms, or are otherwise at high risk for infection or transmission of COVID-19. • Monitor for, and comply with, any orders or regulations issued by federal, provincial, regional/local public health authorities that require individuals to self-isolate in any circumstance, including where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ You test positive for COVID-19 or are awaiting test results. ○ You experience symptoms of COVID-19. ○ You have been in close contact (without personal protective equipment or other precautions) with a suspected, probable or confirmed case of COVID-19. ○ Recent travel.
Hygiene, Cleaning and Disinfection	<p>Opticians must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in routine hand hygiene, including before each patient interaction.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly clean and disinfect common areas and other high-touch surfaces and objects, such as doors, light switches, counter tops, hand rails, keyboards, touch screens and payment pin pads. • Regularly clean and disinfect all equipment, such as pupilometers, lensometers, slit lamps and keratometers, after they have been touched by any staff person or patient. Public Health Ontario recommends using a disinfectant appropriate for a hospital or health care setting, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Alcohol (ethyl or isopropyl) ○ Improved hydrogen peroxide ○ Sodium hypochlorite (bleach) • Clean AND disinfect frames and lenses before and after they have been handled or tried on by a patient or customer. In other words, a two-step process must be applied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cleaning: First, items must be cleaned first using any approved cleaner for that particular equipment as per the manufacturer's instructions (e.g. warm, soapy water). Cleaning refers to the process of removing dirt, grease and other organic material from the surface of an object. Surfaces must be clean in order for disinfectants to work properly. ○ Disinfection: Second, the items must be disinfected using a product approved by Health Canada. The product and method used should reflect the intended use of the items in question, per appropriate public health guidelines (e.g. Public Health Ontario).
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2. Recommendations

This section sets out the College's **recommendations** for opticians to consider in order to enhance infection control measures in the dispensary environment.

The College recognizes that all practice environments are different. Accordingly, while no individual recommendation is mandatory, opticians remain responsible for demonstrating that they have taken steps to ensure a safe practice environment. It is therefore expected that opticians will implement some of the following recommendations in their practice environment, or in the alternative, demonstrate that other measures have been implemented that will be effective in reducing the risk of infection or transmission in the dispensary.

Hygiene, Cleaning and Disinfection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand Sanitation at Entry. Set up a hand washing station and/or provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer (that has been approved by Health Canada) for use at the entrance and exit. • Cleaning/Disinfection Schedule. Implementing a more frequent cleaning/disinfection schedule for all frames and common surfaces in the dispensary.
Masks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear a mask that is surgical grade or higher when working in close proximity to patients, and require any non-optician staff to do the same. • Implement a mask policy for patients/visitors, and take steps to accommodate patients who are unable or unwilling to wear a mask (e.g. remote service, or scheduling an appointment when no other patients are present in the store).
Patient Screening and Contact Tracing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen patients/customers before they book an appointment and/or before they enter the dispensary, and make appropriate adjustments to the services you provide to patients who screen positive (e.g. offering remote service, or delaying the appointment). Opticians may wish to refer to the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Patient Screening Guidance Document for a reference on the types of screening questions to ask. • Maintain a list or record of everyone who visits the dispensary (including patients and other visitors) for the purposes of contact tracing in the event that a probable or confirmed COVID-19 infection is reported in the workplace.

Safety Enhancements for the Dispensary

- **Implement physical distancing measures in the workplace**, which might include some or all of the following, as applicable/appropriate
 - Encouraging individuals to attend by appointment
 - Limiting the number of walk-ins.
 - Placing signs in the dispensary that encourage physical distancing and provide instructions for doing so.
 - Spacing waiting room areas/chairs to ensure minimum 2 metre distance between patients or asking people to wait outside or in their vehicles.
 - Setting up visual cues such as floor markers that are at least 2 metres apart or arrows to indicate a directional flow through the facility.
- **Add physical barriers** (such as plexiglass or acrylic partitions) at counters and reception desks that are regularly sanitized.
- **Mount plexiglass or plastic shields** on to dispensary equipment such as pupilometers, keratomers, and slit lamps and ensure they are regularly sanitized.
- **Remove non-essential items** from waiting areas, such as magazines or pamphlets.
- **Reduce unnecessary handling.** Take steps to reduce the likelihood that frames or other retail items will be touched or handled by patients or customers, such as placing frames and other retail items in display cases or behind barriers, or by posting signs asking individuals to request assistance before handling items.
- **Use contactless payment methods** such as tap, and discourage cash payments
- **Develop a process/system** for differentiating sterilized equipment/frames from ones that require sterilization (e.g. colour coding).
- **Develop an outbreak procedure** in the event that a probable or confirmed COVID-19 infection is reported in the workplace or by a patient who recently attended at the dispensary that includes risk assessment, cleaning and disinfection protocols, staffing

	<p>considerations and contact tracing. Opticians who are employers or facility operators should ensure that they comply with any Occupational Health and Safety requirements regarding written policies for infection control and/or outbreak procedure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace policies. Dispensary owners may consider implementing policies that will prohibit eating/drinking in areas where sterilized lenses, frames or other equipment are processed or handled. • Ventilation systems or HEPA filters. HEPA filters and/or certain modifications to ventilation systems may serve as an enhanced infection control mechanism by reducing the likelihood that respiratory droplets are circulated throughout the dispensary environment. Measures such as ensuring proper functioning and adjustment of humidity levels may be beneficial.
Contact Lens Fittings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise care when performing contact lens fittings, including initial contact lens fittings, to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 via tear films and/or direct contact with the ocular membrane, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limiting close contact: take steps to limit the amount of time that must be spent in close proximity to the patient. ○ Optician PPE: wear a mask that is surgical grade or higher, as well as additional personal protective equipment such as a face shield and eye protection, and practice thorough hand hygiene. ○ Patient mask: have the patient wear a surgical mask.
Remote Practice and Reducing Close Contact	<p>As a reminder, the Standards of Practice permit opticians to engage in remote practice in many circumstances. Remote practice can be an effective way to mitigate risk by reducing or eliminating the need for close contact. Some ways that remote practice can be used in line with the Standards include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrying out consultations by telephone, video conference or email. • Using existing measurement information where available. • Using “contactless” methods of delivery where, in your judgment, fitting and adapting can be carried out as a later date (see Page 13 of the Standards of Practice for practice guidelines on the delivery of prescription eyeglasses prior to fitting and adapting). Examples

	<p>of contactless delivery include direct shopping, curbside pickup, or creating a drop off/pick up tray that is sanitized after each use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking patients to put on and remove frames themselves whenever possible. • Using “contactless” methods to carry out necessary adjustments, such as using a sanitized drop off/pick up tray to hand the appliance back and forth. • Remote refills for replacement contact lenses for established contact lens patients. <p>In all cases, opticians should take steps to ensure that patients come in for follow up care, as necessary.</p>
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3. Resources

Patient Screening and Workplace Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 Patient Screening Guidance Document – Ontario Ministry of Health • COVID-19 Guidance: Essential Workplaces – Ontario Ministry of Health • Signage for health care settings – Ontario Ministry of Health
Hygiene and Infection Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hand Hygiene Practices in Healthcare Settings” published by the Public Health Agency of Canada • “How to Wash Your Hands” fact sheet published by Public Health Ontario • List of hand sanitizers authorized by Health Canada. • “Best Practices for Environmental Cleaning for Prevention and Control of Infections in All Health Care Settings, 3rd Edition” published by Public Health Ontario • “Best Practices for Prevention, Surveillance and Infection Control Management of Novel Respiratory Infections in All Health Care Settings” published by Public Health Ontario
Supplying or Finding PPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Ontario Together: help fight coronavirus: Sell medical supplies, find personal protective equipment (PPE), solve problems, or volunteer to help protect against COVID-19” published by the Government of Ontario
Use of PPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Recommended Steps for Putting On and Taking Off Personal Protective Equipment” published by Public Health Ontario

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Putting on Mask and Eye Protection” (video) published by Public Health Ontario • “IPAC Recommendations for Use of Personal Protective Equipment for Care of Individuals with Suspect or Confirmed COVID-19” published by Public Health Ontario • “COVID-19 Guidance: Information on the Use of N95 Filtering Facepiece Respirators Beyond the Manufacturer designated Shelf Life” published by the Ontario Ministry of Health • “Understanding the Difference, Surgical Mask and N95 Respirator” published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention • “Non-medical masks and face coverings: About” published by the Public Health Agency of Canada • “Face coverings and face masks” published by the Ontario Ministry of Health
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Standard 4: Safety and Infection Control in the Practice Environment

An optician shall take reasonable and appropriate measures to minimize the risk of contamination and subsequent transmission of infectious agents within their professional practices. An optician shall ensure that the practice site is equipped and maintained, and that procedures are in place, to ensure health and safety for both patients and staff.

Criteria:

1. An optician shall adhere to all federal, provincial, and municipal requirements (including health and safety) and shall make best efforts to ensure the practice environment is compliant.
2. An optician shall remain informed of current infectious disease risks, symptoms, paths of transmission and prevention strategies in their community and practice setting.
3. An optician shall familiarize themselves with current techniques used to disinfect the office and control transmission of infectious agents.
4. An optician shall devise and/or follow a protocol that outlines frequency and specific responsibility for disinfection of the practice and instrumentation.
5. An optician shall follow routine precautions at all times (e.g., hand washing and appropriate waste disposal).
6. An optician shall take reasonable steps to ensure that workplace safety protocols are followed.

Practice Guidelines

Opticians are expected to use their professional judgement to ensure a clean, safe, practice environment.

Standard 4 requires opticians to take reasonable and appropriate measures to minimize the risk of contamination and subsequent transmission of infectious agents within their professional practices. To meet this Standard, opticians must ensure that all frequently used equipment, items and areas of the dispensary are cleaned **and** disinfected/sterilized on a regular basis. Opticians are responsible for using their professional judgment to determine the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting/sterilization practices, and are expected to take into account any relevant infectious disease risks in their community and/or practice setting.

- **Cleaning** refers to the process of removing dirt, grease and other organic material from the surface of an object using a cleanser that has been approved for the particular equipment or item in question (e.g. warm, soapy water). Items/surfaces must be clean in order for disinfectants to work properly.
- **Disinfecting/Sterilizing** refers to the process of eliminating or destroying microbes and/or pathogenic microorganisms from a surface. The product or method used for this process should reflect the intended use of the items/surfaces in question.

The following areas must be cleaned and disinfected on a regular basis, the frequency of which must increase should there be an infectious disease risk.

- common areas, other high touch surfaces and objects such as doors, light switches, counter tops, handrails, keyboards, touch screens and payment pin pads.
- All equipment such as pupliometers, lensometers, slit lamps, keratometers, or any other piece of equipment after they have been touched by any staff person or patient.
- Frames and lenses after they have been touched by a patient or customer.

Practice Resources

Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care have information specifically regarding infection control guidelines and health alerts, including pandemic plans. The following are links to relevant resources:

- The Government of Canada's National Public Health Notices:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/public-health-notice.html>
- The Province of Ontario's **Infection Prevention and Control Protocol, 2018**:
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/protocols_guidelines/Infection_Prevention_And_Control_Protocol_2018_en.pdf
- The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (**WHMIS**) website provides information about hazardous products that may be present in the workforce and how to safely manage them: <http://whmis.org/jurisdictions/on.html>
- **Best Practices for Environmental Cleaning for Prevention and Control of Infections**
https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/B/2018/bp-environmental-cleaning.pdf?rev=4b78a8dee04a439384bf4e95697f5ab2&sc_lang=en