

BRIEFING NOTE

TO: Board Of Directors

FROM: Clinical Practice Committee

DATE: May 30, 2022

SUBJECT: 10.0 COVID-19 Practice Guidelines

☒ For Decision

☐ For Information

☐ Monitoring Report

Purpose:

To review and approve draft COVID-19 Practice Guidelines that will come into effect once current public health restrictions are lifted on or after June 11, 2022.

Background:

In May 2020, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the College developed COVID-19 Return to Practice Guidelines. The purpose of these guidelines was to provide additional information on how opticians should interpret the Standards of Practice, in particular Standard 4 which pertains to safety and infection control in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidelines have been updated as required.

The province lifted masking requirements for most public health settings in March 2022, however, kept them in place for select indoor settings, including health care settings. In addition to masking requirements, other directives, such as screening and capacity limits remain in place. These restrictions were originally going to be lifted April 27, 2022, however, the Government extended them until at least June 11, 2022.

For Consideration:

The College has identified a need to ensure updated guidance will be available to registrants once the remaining Government restrictions are lifted.

The Clinical Practice Committee met April 12, 2022, and April 26, 2022, to review the existing guidelines and propose updates.

Upon review of the COVID-19 Return to Practice Guidelines, the Clinical Practice Committee determined that the document should be updated to:

- provide guidance to registrants on what extra precautions should be taken once the remaining Government restrictions are lifted

- identify any enhanced safety measures that were still required in the practice environment

The updated guidelines distinguish between requirements and recommendations and emphasizes opticians' continued responsibility to ensure a safe practice environment. These guidelines include sections on:

- Public Health and Emergency Orders
- Self-screening and Isolating
- Hygiene, Cleaning, and Infection Control

Once approved, the guidelines would come into effect the date the remaining restrictions are lifted. This is expected to occur June 11, 2022, however, if the restrictions are extended again, the guidelines will not come into effect until they are lifted.

The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document will remain on the COVID-19 page and be updated as required.

Public Interest Considerations:

Having guidelines specific to safety and infection control during the COVID-19 pandemic will provide opticians with additional guidance to ensure they are practicing safely.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Considerations:

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

Recommendations/Action Required:

The Board is asked to review and approve the guidelines. If approved, the guidelines will not come into effect until such time as remaining public health restrictions are lifted in health care settings.

COVID-19 Practice Guidelines for Registered Opticians

The following Practice Guidelines, which are effective on **DATE**, 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, regulations by-laws or directives 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 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	Opticians may wish to consider: <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	Opticians may wish to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wearing 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. • Implementing 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	Opticians may wish to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screening 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. • Maintaining 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	<p>Opticians may wish to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing physical distancing measures in the workplace, which might include some or all of the following, as applicable/ appropriate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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 reasonable distance between patients or asking people to wait outside or in their vehicles. ○ Setting up visual cues such as floor markers or arrows to indicate a directional flow through the facility. • Adding physical barriers (such as plexiglass or acrylic partitions) at counters and reception desks that are regularly sanitized. • Mounting plexiglass or plastic shields on to dispensary equipment such as pupilometers, keratomers, and slit lamps and ensure they are regularly sanitized. • Removing non-essential items from waiting areas, such as magazines or pamphlets. • Reducing 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. • Using contactless payment methods such as tap, and discourage cash payments

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a process/system for differentiating sterilized equipment/frames from ones that require sterilization (e.g. colour coding). • Developing 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 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. • 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	<p>Opticians may wish to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercising 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 mask that is surgical grade or higher.
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</p>

	<p>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 of contactless delivery include direct shopping, curbside pickup, or creating a drop off/pick up tray that is sanitized after each use. • 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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “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 • “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