

## **COVID-19 Return to Practice Guidelines for Registered Opticians**

The Nova Scotia College of Dispensing Opticians (The College) has developed the following practice guidelines for Registered Opticians who will be returning to practice following the relaxation of the current restrictions on nonessential health services. Presently, all regulated health professionals remain subject to a n HPA Order to refrain from providing non-essential health services until further notice.

The purpose of these Guidelines is to provide additional information on how opticians should interpret this standard in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A return to practice does not mean a return to business as usual. While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose a public health risk, it will be incumbent on all registrants to take extra precautions to ensure safety for themselves, their patients, and their staff.

It is also important that opticians demonstrate to their patients and staff that measures have been taken to ensure their health and safety, through regular communication on the protocols taken by the dispensary, and visible implementation of those protocols (e.g. cleaning and disinfecting frames and equipment in front of the patient).

These Guidelines are intended to provide additional detail to the [Nova Scotia College of Dispensing Opticians Standards of Practice](#) and must be read in conjunction with them. The Standards, which continue to apply, and will come into effect once the government issues a direction permitting opticians to resume non-essential practice. All Standards apply and in particular:

### **Standard 5 Maintenance of Professional and Hygienic Premises:**

Dispensing Opticians shall engage in dispensing activities from premises which are professional in appearance and maintained in a sanitary and hygienic condition.

### **Standard 6 Use of Current, Accurate and Hygienic Equipment:**

Opticians must maintain and utilize current, accurate and hygienic equipment. Each Dispensing Optician shall have:

- a) adjustment and bench tools
- b) lensometer
- c) lens gauge
- d) frame heater

Opticians must take reasonable and appropriate measures to minimize the risk of contamination and subsequent transmission of infectious agents within their practice environment. They must also ensure that the practice site is equipped and maintained, and that procedures are in place to

ensure health and safety of both patients and staff. Failing to meet this Standard is a form of professional misconduct and could result in a referral to the discipline committee.

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

The guidelines are broken down into five categories of control:

- 1) Elimination
- 2) Substitution
- 3) Engineering
- 4) Administrative
- 5) Personal Protective Equipment

The categories are in order of effectiveness, with the first being the most effective form of protection, to the last, Personal Protective Equipment being the least effective.

<b>1) Elimination</b>	<p><b>As much as practically possible</b>, try to find ways to eliminate or reduce time of physical contact with clients, patients, and colleagues. Consider the following:</p> <p><b>Virtual Care.</b> Virtual care using telephone, video, email, and other technology should be the first choice to protect opticians and clients.</p> <p>Pre-screening should happen prior to any in-office care. Ideally, this should be done virtually before the client comes to the office.</p> <p><b>Gather as much information</b> as possible over the phone or with the use of technology to reduce the amount of time spent in office.</p> <p>Screen for current presence of COVID-19 symptoms or exposure to someone who tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 14 days.</p>
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	<p>Suggest that clients complete the 811 online assessment before they come to the office <a href="https://when-to-call-about-covid19.novascotia.ca/en">https://when-to-call-about-covid19.novascotia.ca/en</a>.</p> <p>Clients should be apprised of what to expect when they come for their visit.</p> <p>Clients should be advised as to what will be expected of them. i.e. not coming early for appointment, calling when arriving for appointment, waiting in the car to be called in for appointment, and so forth.</p> <p>If screening is done without the 811 online assessment, such as verbally screening the client, any client who has one or more of the symptoms of COVID-19 should be directed to 811 online assessment before booking an office appointment. Clients arriving for an in-person appointment who are experiencing symptoms compatible with COVID-19 must wear a surgical/procedural mask and be isolated in a space away from other clients, opticians, and other staff.</p> <p>If appointment is non-urgent, consider rescheduling the appointment to a later date.</p> <p><b>Alternative methods of delivery.</b> Consider delivery by mail, courier services or curbside pick up.</p> <p>Avoid cash whenever possible.</p> <p><b>Use disposable</b> disinfectant wipes.</p> <p><b>Create</b> a cleaning and disinfecting schedule that mandates a minimum of two cleanings a day or whenever an area is visibly soiled.</p> <p><b>Use contactless</b> or safe distance payment methods such as e-transfer and debit tap payment.</p> <p><b>Regularly clean and disinfect</b> common use areas and high touch areas, such as pin pads, counter tops, light switch plates, toilets, taps, handrails, medical equipment, eyeglass frames, seating areas, keyboards, touch screens, mobile devices, etc.</p>
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<p><b>2) Substitution</b></p>	<p>When possible:  <b>Replace close contact</b> in person care with safer alternatives. Consider performing measurements using technology that maintains a distance greater than 6-feet/2- metres.</p> <p><b>Conduct phone</b> or virtual appointments especially for information gathering prior to an appointment</p>
<p><b>3) Engineering</b></p>	<p>COVID-19 is likely to impact the way that people work for a long time. Try to change the work environment so that people are naturally less likely to come into close contact. This could include:</p> <p><b>Barriers.</b> Where distance can not be maintained, plexiglass type barriers and enclosures can be installed.</p> <p><b>Traffic patterns.</b> Use floor markers to direct flow of people throughout office.</p> <p><b>Signage.</b> Use signage indicating screening criteria and identifying the location of hand wash/sanitize stations.</p> <p><b>Shields.</b> Install shields on optical equipment, such as slit lamps and pupilometers.</p>
<p><b>4) Administrative</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mandatory administrative control to comply with the Nova Scotia Chief Medical officer</b></li> </ul>	<p>The directives of the Nova Scotia Chief Medical Officer must be strictly followed. They include:</p> <p>Reinforce general practices to maintain physical distancing such as avoiding greetings like handshakes.</p> <p><b>Maximum of ten people</b> can be in the business at one time, including staff.</p> <p><b>Maintain a 6-feet/2-metre distance</b> from each person whenever they can. This includes employees.</p> <p>All high touch surfaces and common areas must be cleaned and disinfected after every client, and whenever visibly soiled</p> <p>A thorough cleaning and disinfecting of the office/clinic must be completed twice a day regardless of spot cleaning of high touch and common areas.</p>

	<p><b>Thoroughly wash hands</b> for 20 seconds with soap and water or sanitize at regular intervals and before and after each patient/client/task.</p> <p><b>Post hand-washing signs</b> and provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer (minimum 70%) to patients to encourage frequent hand hygiene, on arrival and departure.</p> <p><b>Remove non-essential items</b> such as magazines and toys and excess furniture from reception areas.</p> <p><b>Staff or patients who exhibit COVID-19 like symptoms</b>, including fever, new cough or a cough that's getting worse, sore throat, runny nose and/or headache or who have travelled outside of the province in the past 14 days and/or <b>those</b> who have had close contact with someone who has recently tested positive <b>must not enter the business, unless urgent care is needed</b>, and should call 811 for further instructions.</p> <p>Identify a space where staff or clients can be isolated from others if they have symptoms of COVID-19.</p> <p><b>Employers /opticians must adjust absenteeism policies to enable staff to stay home if ill, in self-isolation, or if taking care of children or someone who is ill.</b></p> <p><b>Employers/opticians</b> should ensure plans are in place for increased worker absenteeism due to illness or self-isolation, or care-giving due to illness.</p> <p>Employers/opticians should post accessible signage to discourage staff or clients with symptoms or exposure to COVID-19 in the past 14 days from entering the office/clinic.</p> <p>Staff should be provided access to tissues, touchless waste receptacles, hand soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizers approved by Health Canada (DIN or NPN number) disinfectants and disposable towels</p> <p>All staff should be trained on workplace protocols, including hygiene and should be provided with adequate resources such as</p>
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	<p>tissues, paper towels or other disposable towels, hand soap, hand sanitizer, disinfectants and or personal protective equipment (PPE), as appropriate</p> <p>Offices should encourage individual measures such as frequent hand washing, and avoiding touching the face, mouth, and eyes.</p> <p>Opticians must stay informed regarding evolving orders and guidelines and must keep their staff informed and up to date on any changes to the guidelines.</p> <p>Opticians and staff should continue to self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms.</p> <p>Any optician or staff who develop symptoms of COVID-19 in the workplaces must immediately apply a surgical/procedural mask and be excluded from work and sent home. Opticians or staff displaying COVID-19 symptoms should be directed to call 811 and arrange for a COVID-19 testing</p> <p>Where possible, sharing of phones and desks, workspaces, tools, and equipment should be discouraged.</p> <p>Opticians should consider establishing an outbreak procedure for if a probable or confirmed infection is reported. The procedure should include areas such as cleaning and sanitizing and call triaging.</p> <p>Refer to the following resource for additional information: <a href="https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/working-during-covid-19/">https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/working-during-covid-19/</a></p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mandatory Administrative Control to comply with the Nova Scotia College of Dispensing Opticians Standards of Practice</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>According to Standard 5 and Standard 6</b>, opticians are required to maintain premises and equipment in sanitary and hygienic condition.</p> <p><b>In addition to following NS DHW cleaning guidelines</b> of workspaces and high touch areas, it is also required that opticians wash each and every frame that is tried on or handled by patients with soap and water or using another NSDHW approved disinfection method.</p> <p><b>Opticians must keep equipment</b>, tools, touch surfaces and common areas disinfected between every patient/use.</p> <p>Offices that have lab, diagnostic and ancillary services within their clinic should consider pre-booked appointments and other measures to maintain public health requirements for physical distancing.</p> <p><b>Opticians must engage</b> in effective hand hygiene, washing with soap and water for 20 seconds or using an approved hand sanitizer at the beginning and end of each shift and before and after each patient.</p> <p><b>Opticians must remain apprised</b> of and adhere to, rapidly evolving orders and guidelines published by provincial and federal authorities on hygiene, cleaning, and disinfecting protocols for healthcare and/or retail settings during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Reference Standards of Practice: <a href="https://nscdo.ca/pdfs/Standards_of_Practice_2012.pdf">https://nscdo.ca/pdfs/Standards_of_Practice_2012.pdf</a></p> <p>For additional information, <a href="https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/">https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/</a></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Other Administrative Control Measures:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Barriers</b></li> <li>• <b>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</b></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>The following are strongly advised to help keep everyone safe and reduce the spread of COVID-19.</p> <p><b>Maintaining a 6-foot/2-meter distance</b> from colleagues and patients should be followed as much as possible.</p> <p><b>Tasks requiring two or more people</b> to be inside of the minimum 6 foot/2-meter space should consider delaying or forgoing the procedure.</p> <p><b>Use a barrier</b> such as plexiglass or plastic shields</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Contact Lens Fittings</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>All barriers should</b> be cleaned and sanitized every 20 minutes or after appointments and in between clients.</p> <p>Cleaning and sanitizing information is available at <a href="https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/staying-healthy/#clean">https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/staying-healthy/#clean</a></p> <p><b>Find an</b> alternative method to perform the same task.</p> <p><b>If the task is unavoidable:</b></p> <p><b>Use of PPE</b> (personal protective equipment):</p> <p>Surgical/procedural masks should be considered in the workplace for all health care professional and staff providing direct client care with a client who has symptoms compatible for COVID-19. When 6-feet/2-meter distancing cannot be maintained, opticians should consider wearing a surgical/procedural mask and face shield or a mask and goggles.</p> <p><b>Client must</b> wear a non-surgical mask.</p> <p><b>Opticians must</b> use professional judgement to determine when PPE is necessary to provide a service or when to look to alternative methods for providing services that maintain physical distancing.</p> <p><b>Space chairs</b> to ensure 6-feet/2-meters distance between patients and/or ask individuals to wait outside or in their vehicles.</p> <p><b>Ask clients</b> to come to appointments alone, whenever possible. If this is not an option, when possible, support person must remain in car or if support care is required the support person must wear a PPE or non-surgical mask.</p> <p>Screen clients again prior to appointment and prior to entering the business. If client is displaying one or more COVID-19 symptoms, reschedule the appointment to a later date.</p> <p>Recommend that client complete the 811 online assessment.</p> <p><b>Clients who are</b> unable or unwilling to comply with a store policy regarding the use of PPE or non-surgical masks, opticians should consider alternative ways of providing services that will allow for physical distancing.</p>
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	<p><b>Where no alternatives</b> to close physical contact are available, the optician should use professional judgement to determine whether it is in the client's and optician's best interest to decline the requested service.</p> <p><b>Where possible, staff</b> should not share workspaces, phones, tools or writing instruments.</p> <p><b>Reduce</b> the number of common surfaces that need to be touched such as installing no-touch waste containers.</p> <p><b>In the event that</b> shared workspaces are the only option, the spaces should be cleaned and sanitized in between client appointments and between opticians and other staff use.</p> <p><b>Maintain a record</b> of all clients/support people/staff/opticians who enter the premises to assist in contact tracing, in the event of a reported COVID-19 case, in the workplace.</p> <p><b>Wash clothes daily</b> and avoid wearing jewellery and unnecessary items.</p> <p><b>Use a pupillary</b> distance measure on file or use an electronic device that maintains a distance greater than 6-feet/2-meters.</p> <p><b>Use an electronic device</b> or mark a reference point on the lenses, have patient try on the glasses and observe from a distance greater than 6-feet/2-meters to obtain a segment height.</p> <p><b>Consider having</b> the patient return later for an adjustment.</p> <p><b>Encourage patients/clients</b> to enter the premises by appointment only. Have them wait outside or in the car and ask them to call to advise that they have arrived for appointment. Call the client when it is time for the appointment.</p> <p>Avoid greetings such as handshakes or hugs.</p> <p><b>Limit exchange</b> of receipts and other papers by using electronic transfer.</p> <p><b>Reduce unnecessary handling</b> of frames and other retail items. Limit the selection of frames available to patients. Ask patients to select by pointing from a distance or selecting from a catalogue or</p>
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	<p>from an online/website selection. Ask clients to put on and remove frames themselves whenever possible.</p> <p><b>Ask patients</b> to not speak during measurements and other close encounters. PPE/non-surgical face mask must be worn by clients. Opticians should consider wearing surgical/procedural masks and face shield or surgical/procedure mask and goggles.</p> <p><b>Prior to and after</b> adjusting or repairing patient’s eyewear, frames must be properly cleaned and sanitized.</p> <p>Opticians in offices or clinics that have labs, diagnostic and ancillary services should pre-booked client appointments</p> <p><b>Initial Contact Lens Fittings</b> Research continues to be conducted on the risk of transmitting COVID-19 via tear film and/or direct contact with the ocular membrane. Considering this potential risk, the College strongly recommends the following:</p> <p><b>New Contact Lens Fittings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>That opticians refrain</b> from performing initial contact lens fittings as fittings typically require close physical contact for a prolonged period of time, and it is generally not possible to use adequate PPE.</li> </ul> <p><b>Established Contact Lens Patients:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That physical distancing measures and remote practice be used to the greatest extent possible when delivering continuing care and replacement services to established contact lens patients.</li> <li>• <b>Where a client requires urgent care requiring close proximity</b> (e.g. for a dislodged lens), opticians must ensure that they thoroughly wash their hands and use appropriate PPE where applicable. Where in the optician’s judgment, the risk level cannot be appropriately mitigated, the patient should be referred to another health care provider.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>5) Personal Protective Equipment</b></p>	<p><b>The optician must use professional judgement</b> to determine if personal protective equipment will enhance safety of themselves and/or others. Follow evolving orders and guidelines published by provincial and federal authorities on the selection and proper use of personal protective equipment.</p> <p><b>A surgical/procedural mask and face shield</b> or a surgical/procedural mask and goggles/safety glasses are required for any interactions that require the optician to be closer than 6-feet proximity to a client and is not protected by a barrier.</p> <p>Clients must also wear a non-surgical mask.</p> <p><b>Gloves may be worn</b> but must be changed or sanitized between each client and/or task.</p> <p><b>The use of personal protective equipment does not negate the optician’s obligation to engage in physical distancing, hygiene, cleaning, and disinfection protocols outlined above.</b></p>
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