

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

The Nova Scotia College of Dispensing Opticians (The College) has developed the following revised guidelines for Registered Opticians. 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).

Under the amended directive, regulated health professionals may gradually restart all deferred, nonessential, and elective services provided they comply with the requirements set out in NSCDO COVID-19 Return to Work Guidelines.

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.

\*NOTE: Opticians who employ others or operate a health facility must also familiarize themselves with their additional obligations under Occupational Health and Safety legislation. These guidelines will be updated continually as new information becomes available. Please review these Guidelines on a regular basis to ensure currency.

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.

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>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</p>
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	<p>appointment, waiting in the car to be called in for appointment, and so forth.</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>
<p><b>2) Substitution</b></p>	<p>When possible:</p> <p><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. It is recommended that opticians continue to 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 followed. They include:</p> <p>Reinforce general practices to maintain physical distancing such as avoiding greetings like handshakes.</p> <p>Maintain a 6-feet/2-metre distance 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>
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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>Public Health and Emergency Orders. Opticians must comply with any federal, provincial, regional, or municipal orders, laws or by-laws relating to public health or emergency measures, including requirements relating to capacity limits, appointments and/or hour restrictions.</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 COVID19 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>
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<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> <li>• <b>Contact Lens Fitting</b></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>The following continue to be strongly recommended</b> 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>For tasks requiring two or more people</b> to be inside of the minimum 6 foot/2-meter space, wearing masks continues to be strongly recommended.</p> <p><b>Use a barrier</b> such as plexiglass or plastic shields is strongly recommended.</p> <p><b>If Plexiglass and face shields are used, all barriers should be</b> 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>If the task is unavoidable:</b> <b>Use of PPE</b> (personal protective equipment):</p> <p>Surgical/procedural masks should <b>continue to be considered</b> in the workplace for all health care professional and staff providing direct client care with a client who has symptoms compatible for COVID-19.</p> <p>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>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>
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	<p><b>Clean AND disinfect frame and lenses</b> 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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o <b>Cleaning:</b> 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 for disinfectants to work properly.</li><li>o <b>Disinfection:</b> 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). It is up to the optician to ensure that the cleaning and disinfection products and methods that they use are appropriate to the frame material, having regard to both public health guidelines and manufacturer recommendations.</li></ul>
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	<p><b>Contact Lens Fittings</b></p> <p>Research continues to be conducted on the risk of transmitting COVID-19 via tear film and/or direct contact with the ocular membrane. Opticians should continue to be mindful of their own safety as well as that of staff and clients.</p> <p>With the move to Phase 5:</p> <p><b>Opticians may recommence</b> all in-person elective/non-urgent contact lens fittings, both initial and existing, so long as established safety protocols are followed.</p> <p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <p><b>When and where possible physical distancing</b> measures should continue to be used to the greatest extent possible when delivering continuing care and replacement services to established contact lens patients.</p> <p><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 before and after care.</p> <p><b>The continued use</b> of PPE is strongly recommended.</p>
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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 strongly recommended 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><b>Strongly recommend</b> that, when possible, clients 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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**Additionally, other provincial, regional, or municipal orders or guidelines** may require opticians to wear masks and/or other PPE in other circumstances, including while indoors in areas accessible to the public.

Please note that these rules may vary from region to region and are subject to change: **Opticians are responsible for regularly reviewing current rules and guidelines.**

Opticians must continue to use professional judgment in all other circumstances to determine if and when PPE is necessary in order to provide any other service, having regard to the following considerations:

- Use of PPE does not negate the optician’s obligation to engage in the physical distancing, hygiene, cleaning and disinfection protocols outlined above.
- It continues to be strongly recommended that PPE be used in conjunction with other approaches e.g. physical barriers, plexiglass.

- The type of PPE that is appropriate will depend on the nature of the interaction or service that is being provided, and may include: surgical masks, N95 respirators, safety glasses/goggles, face shields, or disposable gloves.
- PPE should be obtained from a reliable source to ensure that it meets health and safety guidelines.
- PPE must be used appropriately in order to be effective. This includes:
  - o Ensuring that appropriate steps are taken when putting on and taking off PPE.
  - o Adhering to recommended guidelines on changing and disposing of gloves and masks between patients and when changing tasks