



November 5, 2020

Re: Important COVID-19 update from the PHO re: patient care in community settings and access to PPE

Dear physician,

As BC continues to move through the COVID-19 pandemic, I recognize that you have had to adapt the way you deliver care to protect your health, the health of your staff, and of your patients. I have heard many examples of physicians who have gone above and beyond in their efforts to provide exceptional care to patients during this time. I appreciate your dedication to patient care and thank you for your flexibility and for the essential services you provide to people in your community.

Since the province eased restrictions in May, many of you have asked for clarity regarding the appropriate balance between virtual and in-person patient care in community settings. I acknowledge that online visits and phone consultations are useful tools in patient-centred care and will continue to play a role in community clinical practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, most health problems require one or more in-person assessments over the course of the patient journey. As such, physicians and medical specialists practising in community settings should be providing a blend of virtual and in-person care that meets the medical needs of the patient seeking care while avoiding unnecessary delays. I ask that you use your professional judgement with input from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC, your regional health authority, and Doctors of BC when determining when a patient can or needs to be seen for in-person care.

With appropriate health and safety precautions in place such as advanced patient screening, efficient appointment scheduling, enhanced cleaning and disinfection, and the appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE), in-person patient care is safe for routine medical practice. This includes the wearing of medical grade masks by health-care workers, staff, patients, and visitors in all facilities and clinics where health care is delivered including in waiting areas, and following [published COVID-19 infection prevention and control guidelines](#) and [COVID-19 workplace health and safety guidelines](#) for your office setting.

To address PPE access and supply concerns, you will soon have increased access to PPE through the provincial supply chain and distribution system at no charge for the duration of the emergency response. More details on the process and ordering system will be announced by the ministry in the coming weeks. In the interim, please continue to order your supplies from your vendors directly. If you are unable to obtain supplies from usual vendors, please work with your

regional health authority for urgent PPE needs.

There are supports in place to support you and your patients, including the [COVID-19 Office Safety Plan Support Grant](#) for community physicians, [additional funding for pandemic planning](#) for fall and winter, [temporary billing and fee code changes](#) for telehealth, virtual care, and immunization as well as other assistance listed on the [Doctors of BC website](#).

While the pandemic has affected how we practise medicine in many ways, the importance of your services and your patients' health care needs have not changed. You play a critical role in protecting the health and well-being of people living in BC. Thank you again for your continued commitment to deliver high-quality care and ensuring access to appropriate services in communities throughout our province.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Henry
MD, MPH, FRCPC
Provincial Health Officer