



# Care During COVID-19

## Tips for managing physician clinics during coronavirus

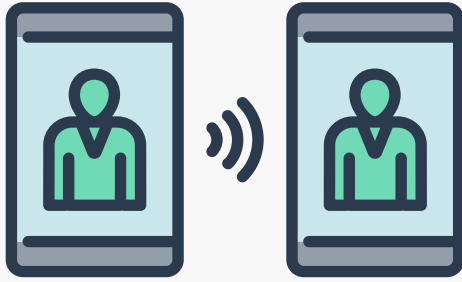
Doctors Nova Scotia | April 2020

**D**octors Nova Scotia (DNS) is committed to providing its members with the latest updates and resources related to COVID-19.

Family physicians across the province are changing their office practices to best manage the needs of their patients, colleagues and staff. Doctors Nova Scotia has combined helpful advice from physicians across the province and other provincial/territorial medical associations. The [Nova Scotia Health Authority's Department of Family Practice](#) has also developed recommendations for managing practice operations.



**SUPPORT FOR VIRTUAL CARE**  
[NSHA virtual care resources](#)



## Managing patient care

- **Book telephone appointments for non-COVID-19 patients** who need to see a physician. Do this for everyone to avoid bringing patients into your office. Minimize the number of patients you have in your office and book in-person appointments for the same day. For information on billing for virtual visits, see the latest *MSI Physicians' Bulletin*: [msi.medavie.bluecross.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/03/Bulletin-March-24-2020-NF-TF-during-pandemic.pdf](http://msi.medavie.bluecross.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/03/Bulletin-March-24-2020-NF-TF-during-pandemic.pdf)
- **Wear a mask for all in-person appointments with patients.** To manage the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), book all in-person appointments for the same day each week.
- **Consider using morning appointments for people who require a routine visit** or are not unwell and avoid mixing sick and not sick patients (i.e. newborns, immunizations, prenatal patients, non-infectious patients).
  - **Baby immunizations should not be deferred for more than a one month**, according to Dr. Scott Halperin, director of the Canadian Center for Vaccinology in Halifax
- **Consider using afternoon appointments for urgent care** to avoid mixing with non-infectious patients. Also provide space between appointments.
- **Reduce the average number of face-to-face appointments** in a day to avoid patient overlap in your waiting room.<sup>1</sup>
- **Have staff call all booked patients in advance** of their appointment to do an initial screening to identify routine or prescription refill requests.<sup>2</sup>
- **Keep routine appointments if you have capacity and can mitigate patient exposure to COVID-19.** To prevent a backlog of appointments and reduce the delayed diagnosis of serious conditions, see patients virtually or in-person on a day you are seeing non-acute healthy patients.
- **Renew routine prescriptions during a virtual visit.** Review patient medication profile and ongoing care plan. Discuss changes in their medical conditions that may require medication changes and lifestyle changes that could change their care plan (i.e. smoking cessation, physical activity, nutrition). Document the discussion in the medical record to meet virtual appointment billing requirements.
- **Consider how to work collaboratively with other practices nearby** (i.e. one group does urgent care while the other does telephone triage and/or non-urgent care).
- **If possible, provide on-call care** to patients to avoid unnecessary emergency department and walk-in visits.
- **If you are unable to provide care virtually or in person, notify patients** and other groups as outlined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia in [Guidelines for the provision of care after hours or during short-term absences](#).
- **Have questions or concerns about your clinical obligations?** Contact the Canadian Medical Protective Association at <https://www.cmpa-acpm.ca/en/covid19>.

1. NLMA. *Practical Tips for Your Clinic* retrieved on March 19, 2020 from <http://www.nlma.nl.ca/page/coronavirus>

2. NLMA. *Practical Tips for Your Clinic* retrieved on March 19, 2020 from <http://www.nlma.nl.ca/page/coronavirus>





## Communicate with administrative staff

Educate your colleagues about how to stay safe and healthy

- **Communicate openly with your staff** to keep them up to date on the ongoing situation and any changes that may be made to the day-to-day operations of the clinic.
- **Understand and empathize with your staff** as they share their worries and concerns about COVID-19.
- **Educate staff on COVID-19 and allow for a two-way dialogue on the subject.**
  - Discuss their safety. If possible, ask administrative staff to work from home and transfer calls to minimize exposure
  - Ensure administrative staff are aware of new policies and procedures to minimize contact
  - Ensure staff can use COVID-19 screening tools and are familiar with 811
  - Review how to use personal protective equipment with administrative staff

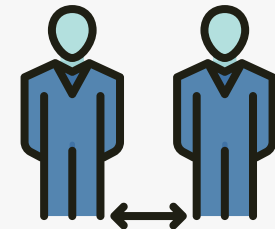


## Take stock of resources

- **Do regular checks on staff:** administration, nursing, non-physician providers, physicians.
- **Develop plans for when your office:**
  - Has < 50% admin, 0% admin
  - Has < 50% health-care providers, 0% health-care providers
- **Use staff in self-isolation** for telephone triaging and care.
- **Use all health-care providers to their full scope** of practice.

## Office COVID-19 precautions

Follow standard precautions in your office or community clinic as you would for other respiratory illnesses. Public health has developed office-based infection prevention and control measures. Here are some other helpful ideas:



- Implement social distancing practices in your waiting room by removing some of the chairs to allow for greater distances (two or more metres) between patients and staff.<sup>1</sup>
- Advise that only patients who have appointments are allowed in the waiting room. No additional family members or friends are permitted unless the patient requires additional assistance.<sup>2</sup>
  - If you choose to close or reduce the capacity of your waiting room, ask patients to wait in their cars until clinic staff contact them.<sup>3</sup>
- Upon entry, advise patients to sanitize their hands and to not touch any surfaces.<sup>4</sup>
- Take extra precaution in offices by:
  - Placing floor tape to keep patients two metres from the receptionist
  - Close reception windows to small slit
  - Provide lots of garbage cans and hand sanitizer in waiting and exam rooms
  - Minimize bathroom use
  - Keep Virox wipes in exam rooms. At the end of each exam, wipe down the surfaces that were in contact with the patient
  - Place masks where they can be easily managed for loss prevention
  - Eliminate pillows, extra drapes and gowns
  - Remove extra chairs and arrange at best possible distance apart
  - Arrange to see sick patients in one area (i.e. in one room or hall)
  - Arrange for more frequent cleaning, especially through day, if seeing sick people
- Ask COVID-19 screening questions at the time of appointment booking. Reassure patients who screen positively for the virus and offer them a virtual care appointment in addition to referring them to the nearest assessment centre.

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2. NLMA. Practical Tips for Your Clinic retrieved on March 19, 2020 from <http://www.nlm.ca/page/coronavirus>

3. NLMA. Practical Tips for Your Clinic retrieved on March 19, 2020 from <http://www.nlm.ca/page/coronavirus>

4. NLMA. Practical Tips for Your Clinic retrieved on March 19, 2020 from <http://www.nlm.ca/page/coronavirus>



# Communicate with patients

*Ensure your phone, website and office signage is up to date*

- Update clinic answering machines or message managers to pass along any new information, hours of operation or office protocol changes relevant to your patients.
  - Include hours, procedures, prescription refill info, on-call info, COVID-19 screening and 811 info
  - Promote non face-to-face visits
- Let patients know your clinic is open and seeing patients. Emphasize that procedures are in place to reduce risks.
- Update practice websites to include new office booking procedures, office hours and useful COVID-19 links, such as interactive screening tools.
- Update office door signage to reflect:
  - COVID-19 screening protocols
  - No office waiting room pictures
  - Mask info
- If comfortable, set up a Facebook page for your clinic to provide real-time updates to patients and your community.
  - Facebook pages will allow you to communicate more broadly and quickly to your patients. You can also choose to open or close comments to the public
  - A Facebook page will also allow you to share links to information such as self-assessment tools, how to self-isolate and other important resources



# Prescription refills

The Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia has provided the following information for physicians:

- To help protect the Canadian drug supply, pharmacy regulators and governments across Canada have imposed a 30-day limit on dispensing prescriptions—regardless of the length of the original prescription. Pharmacists have the authority to provide a longer duration if required. The Nova Scotia government is covering additional dispensing fees for Pharmacare program prescription refills. This covers the extra fees for prescriptions that are usually filled for longer periods and are now only filled for 30 days. Government is also waiving the \$5.00 prescription co-pay for people in the Income Assistance program and the Low Income Pharmacare for Children program.
- To minimize the risk of community spread of COVID-19, pharmacies are limiting the number of customers visiting pharmacies, and the amount of time they spend in pharmacies. Physicians are asked to:
  - E-prescribe, fax or call in prescriptions and communicate the following to patients:
  - Prescription requests are higher than usual and there may be delays in preparation time. If patients require the prescription within 24 to 48 hours, they should contact the pharmacy to confirm when it can be picked up
  - If patients require other services, ask them to call the pharmacy first to book an appointment time
  - Ask patients to use pharmacy apps or phone services to refill prescriptions
- Most pharmacies offer delivery and parking lot services. Ask patients to contact their pharmacy for details.
- Given the change in physician practices/times/locations, pharmacists have had difficulty reaching physicians to ask questions. In particular, prescriptions about controlled drugs and substances act (CDSA) drugs (i.e. narcotics, controlled drugs, benzodiazepines). If your contact details have changed, please provide contact instructions on the prescriptions you send in.
- While pharmacists are able to bridge the gap and provide prescriptions for CDSA drugs during the COVID-19 pandemic when a physician is not available, continued involvement of a physician helps to mitigate risks within the ongoing opioid crisis. Physicians are able to e-prescribe, verbal order or fax prescriptions for CDSA drugs at this time.