

COVID-19 UPDATE REGARDING THE PROVISION OF IN-PERSON AND VIRTUAL CARE

October 13, 2021

COVID-19 Update: In-Person and Virtual Care

Dear Ontario Physicians,

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed significant pressures on health system resources over the last 18 months. We want to thank you for the wide range of care and services you've provided and acknowledge the multitude of challenges and burnout that many of you have experienced.

Based on advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, public health guidance from earlier in the pandemic encouraged physicians to use a virtual care "first" approach, meaning whenever possible and appropriate. However, the pressures that led to prioritizing the adoption of virtual care over in-person care (e.g., lack of PPE, severity of the pandemic) have now diminished.

We know that many physicians are striking the right balance between virtual and in-person care, however, collectively we are increasingly hearing about physicians' offices that are not providing inperson care. While virtual care has enabled access to care during the pandemic, given broad vaccination coverage and fully accessible PPE, COVID-19 should no longer pose a barrier to in-person practice.

There are limits to what can be done virtually and the standard of care is often difficult to meet in a virtual care environment. While physicians are ultimately responsible for determining the appropriateness of providing virtual care in the circumstances presented, it is important to remember that the standard of care must always be met. In-person care is essential for certain conditions and services or where physical assessments are necessary to make an appropriate diagnosis or treatment decision. There are many patients for whom the standard of care cannot be met in a solely virtual care environment.

Based on the above, it is the joint position of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario that in-person care can be provided safely and appropriately and it is expected that all physicians are providing in-person care based on clinical needs and patient preference.

Vaccination is the most effective measure to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in individuals and in our community.

Thank you for your ongoing work to support the health care system and ensure Ontarians have access to a full range of physician services.

Sincerely,

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Ministry of Health

Patrick Dicerni
Assistant Deputy Minister
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