



CPSNL DIRECTION TO PHYSICIANS REGARDING ACCESS TO CARE FOR PATIENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Notice to College Members

October 19, 2021

These are extraordinary times. We commend physicians for their service and flexibility as we move through this pandemic.

Across our province, physicians are providing both in-person and virtual care. Physicians have developed office systems to pre-screen and sequester potentially COVID-19 infectious patients. Physicians are practising safely and effectively, accessing supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) now available through normal medical supply channels.

Our College is aware that there is a scattering of medical care providers practising virtual medicine exclusively and only offering in-person care to the fully vaccinated and asymptomatic. Physicians and the public have contacted a number of Canadian Colleges seeking guidance on these physician practices. CPSNL, with reference to the work of CPSNS and other Canadian Colleges, has prepared the following frequently asked questions (FAQs) for Newfoundland and Labrador physicians to assist them in their medical treatment decisions.

This and all other Notices can be viewed on our website at www.cpsnl.ca > News

All College communication to its members will be by email. It is a professional obligation for College members to read all College communications.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the relevant policies and standards of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Newfoundland and Labrador regarding virtual care?

Physicians must only provide virtual care if it is in the individual patient's best interest. In reaching a decision as to whether virtual care is appropriate, physicians must consider the individual patient's existing health status, healthcare needs, and circumstances. Patient preference regarding an in-person appointment is paramount and must be considered.

Physicians must appropriately balance in-person and virtual care. Not all patients will be able to receive the care they need virtually. In-person care is essential for many conditions or where physical assessments are necessary. There are many patients for whom the standard of care cannot be met in a solely virtual care environment.

Please refer to the CPSNL Standard of Practice: Virtual Care and the CPSNL Standard of Practice: Continuity of Care for more information. Both are available on the CPSNL website under "Policies & Guidance."

Can I refuse to see a patient in-person because they are unvaccinated?

Physicians must ensure unvaccinated patients are given the same access to medical care as vaccinated patients. As a result, physicians must not restrict in-person care to only those patients who have been vaccinated.

Patient care is the maxim. If in-person care cannot be provided safely with processes using, for example, appropriate pre-screening, managing appointment times, appropriate rescheduling of appointments, and the use of PPE and other precautions, every reasonable attempt must be made to arrange timely medical care for the patient. Your reasons for not seeing a patient in-person and your detailed arrangements for timely medical care for the patient must be appropriately documented in the patient's file.

Can I ask for proof of vaccination from a patient before booking an in-person appointment?

Physicians cannot require documented proof that a patient has been vaccinated as a prerequisite for attending their office. However, it is reasonable for physicians to request that patients report their vaccine status. Once aware of a patient's vaccine status, physicians may manage appointment times in a way that does not compromise the health of other patients or their medical office staff.

Is there any guidance available to physicians from the CMA and its Code of Ethics and Professionalism?

The [CMA Code of Ethics and Professionalism](#) provides the following professional responsibility:

12. Respect the decisions of the competent patient to accept or reject any recommended assessment, treatment, or plan of care.

What advice is offered by the CMPA?

The advice of the Canadian Medical Protection Association aligns with the guidance provided by the College and can be found at the [CMPA COVID-19 Hub](#).