

Patient Q and A – Understanding how virtual care works

During the COVID-19 pandemic, BC's physicians are using "virtual care" (connecting with patients through telephone or video) more than ever before.

Virtual care keeps you safe and helps you practice physical distancing. It also keeps your doctor safe so that they can keep caring for your needs during this difficult time.

Virtual appointments are covered by the BC Medical Services Plan. If you need to see your doctor in person, they will arrange to do that in a safe way or refer you to another someone who can.

Below you will find some common questions and answers to help you navigate the world of virtual care. If you have a question we haven't answered below, e-mail us at covid19@doctorsofbc.ca. We will respond and update this document regularly.

How do I book an appointment with my doctor?

Call your doctor's office just as you normally would. Medical office staff will book an appointment and tell you how to prepare for the telephone call or video conference. Some doctors' offices have online booking systems, as well. Patients should not go to their doctor's offices without phoning.

How will my telephone appointment work?

The staff at your doctor's office will tell you if you need to call in for your appointment, or if the doctor will call you. All you have to do is have your telephone with you when it's time for the call.

How will my video appointment work?

If you have taken part in a videoconference call, then this will be familiar (and probably easier).

Your doctor will use a medical videoconferencing app, or a general one like FaceTime or Skype. The clinic will provide the information you need based on the system they use. You will need:

- An e-mail address.
- A good internet connection.
- A computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone with a webcam and microphone (often built in). If you have a reasonably new computer or device, they should have both of those things. It's good to check.

If you are using a mobile device (smartphones and tablets) you may need to download a free application. Your doctor's office will let you know if you need to do that.

What else should I do to prepare for my virtual visit?

It's a good idea to have your BC Care Card (or other ID) ready in case you need it.

Have your clinic's phone number handy, in case you need to call them, and the name and address of your preferred pharmacy.

What if I need to see my doctor in person?

Many health concerns can be addressed in a virtual appointment. If your doctor determines you need to be seen in person, they will arrange for you to visit their office or another clinic.

For in-person visits, always call ahead of time. The medical office staff may ask you to wait outside the clinic until your appointment time to keep those with suspected flu symptoms separated.

What if I can't do a virtual appointment, or don't feel comfortable with it?

If you're unable to see your doctor through virtual care, talk to your doctor about other options. They may be able to see you in person, or refer you to another doctor who can.

If you're uncomfortable, tell your doctor how you feel. Many patients who do not feel comfortable at first, and then actually realize that they like to see their doctor this way because it's convenient and easy.

What if it's an emergency?

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

What steps can I take to protect my privacy?

You can do your part to keep your information private and secure by:

- Attending virtual appointments from a private area.
- Using a personal (not public or employer-provided) email and device.
- Avoiding public Internet networks.