



## Virtual Care: What to expect for your telephone or video visit

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way people across Ontario access health care. Today there are more patients having their appointments virtually.

This handout gives you broad information about virtual care visits. You will get more details about your virtual care visit from your health care team. The details will include what to do if you have trouble connecting to your visit.

### **What is a virtual care visit?**

A virtual care visit is an appointment with your health care provider (for example, doctor or nurse) that happens by telephone or video. Virtual care can also include text messaging and email. This handout is focused on virtual care visits that happen by telephone or video.

Virtual care has helped people safely access the health care they need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **What to expect during a virtual care visit?**

There are many things that are the same about a virtual and in-person visit. Some things are different too. Know what is different about a virtual visit so you can be prepared.

#### **Things that are the same:**

- Your health care providers are the same
- You can ask questions about your care and needs
- Care partners (such as a family member, friend, or caregiver) can join the visit with you
- Your health care provider can order blood tests, x-rays, prescriptions, and any other tests, treatment, or medicines that you need
- You will get test results and discuss them with your health care provider
- Your health care provider will take notes about your care in your medical record

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## Things that may be different:

- If your visit is by telephone:
  - You will not see your health care provider
  - You may be given a range of times when your health care provider will call you. For example, instead of being told your visit is at 1:00 p.m., you may be told that your visit is between 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- If your visit is by video:
  - You may be put into an online waiting room if your health care provider is late. They will join you when they are ready
- Education materials may be emailed or mailed to you
- Care partners who live far-away from you may be able to join a virtual visit
- You may be asked to get blood tests, x-rays, prescriptions, or other tests closer to your home instead of coming to the hospital for them
- You will not get an in-person physical exam. In some cases, an online physical exam may be possible

## Who can have virtual care?

Your health care provider will offer you a virtual visit if they think that the visit can be done by telephone or video. The type of visit you are offered may depend on things like:

- Whether you have a good internet connection or telephone service
- Your comfort using a computer, tablet, or smart phone
- Your comfort speaking English with your health care provider

If a health care provider needs to see you in-person, they will plan an in-person visit. You may have an in-person visit if:

- Your health care provider needs to look at a part of your body in person (such as listen to your heart or look inside your ears)
- You need to have a procedure done
- There are problems with internet or telephone service in your area
- You are taking part in a clinical trial

## Benefits of virtual care

Many patients say virtual care works well for them because:

- You can have your appointment where it is best for you, such as home or work
- You do not have to leave the house to go to your visit
- You spend less time travelling to and from visits
- You may need less time away from work, caregiving, or other tasks
- You can save money on travel and parking costs

- It may be easier for your care partner(s) to join your visits

## Challenges with virtual care

A virtual care visit may be a challenge for you if:

- You have technology issues, such as:
  - A poor internet connection
  - Sound or video not working well
  - Your level of comfort with using a computer, tablet, or smart phone is low
- You find it hard to show your health care team something (such as a part of your body) using a camera on your phone, computer, or tablet
- You do not have a private space to have your virtual care visit
- You have hearing challenges that make it hard to hear your health care provider
- You are used to seeing many health care providers on the same day, but your virtual visits may be spread out over many days

## What you need for a virtual care visit

For a telephone visit you need:

- A telephone with a good connection

For a video visit you need:

- A computer, tablet, or smart phone with a camera, speaker, and microphone
- Internet service with a good connection
- A personal email address. Your health care team will email you information and a link to connect to your video visit
- A landline or mobile phone as back up, to use in case the video visit does not work well
- If you do not have an email address, talk to your health care team about other options for a video visit

## How to prepare for your virtual care visit

Being prepared for your virtual care visit can help it go well.

### Things to do before your virtual care visit

- If you need an interpreter, tell the person who booked your visit as soon as you can
- If you would like to include a care partner in your visit, ask the person booking the visit about how your care partner can connect
- Read through any instructions about your virtual visit

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- Find a comfortable, private, and quiet place for your visit
  - Write down any questions you have before your visit

## Things to have with you during your virtual care visit

- A list of the medicines you take (or the bottles). Your health care team may have questions about the medicines you are taking
- Your health card, a pen, and paper to take notes
- Your glasses and/or hearing aids if you use them

## Preparing for a telephone visit

- Make sure your phone is plugged in or has enough battery power
- If you are using your cell phone, check your cell phone plan to make sure you will not have unexpected costs

## Preparing for a video visit

- Test your device (computer, tablet, or smart phone) using the instructions sent to you by your health care team
- Make sure your device is plugged in or has enough battery power
- Use a stand or prop up your device so that you do not have to hold it
- If you have headphones, have them ready to help block out background noise
- Turn on your speakers, microphone, and camera
- Make sure the room you are in is well-lit
- Use the best connection you have for your video visit. This may be wireless internet or your cellular data from your telephone

## After your virtual care visit

After your virtual care visit, the health care team may send you information about the next steps in your care. Depending on the technology you have, your health care team will send you the information through email, mail, or an online patient portal.

This information may include:

- Your next planned visit(s)
- Visits for any tests, procedures, or other care that you need
- Education about how to care for yourself or information about your illness

## How is my privacy protected during a virtual care visit?

Your privacy is very important to your health care team.

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- At the start of a virtual visit your health care provider may ask questions to confirm who you are. You may be asked to give your birth date and your health card number
  - Your health care team may ask you if you are in a private place and if you give permission for the visit to start
  - Different computer programs (such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams) used for virtual care have their own privacy rules and safety checks. Ask your health care team for more information about the program they use if you are concerned about privacy
  - Use your personal email address for virtual care visits. A business email address belongs to your employer and should not be used for virtual care

## **What if you do not want to have a virtual care visit?**

Tell your health care team if you have concerns about a virtual care visit. They may be able to:

- Help you with your concerns
- Use a different type of virtual care visit (for example, telephone instead of video)