

# WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN RECEIVING VIRTUAL CARE FROM ONTARIO DOCTORS

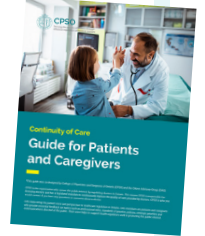


The content in this resource has been adapted from CPSO's [Virtual Care](#) policy. Relevant information has been summarized to help patients and caregivers understand what to expect when receiving virtual care from an Ontario doctor.

» **Virtual care is any interaction that occurs remotely (i.e., not in-person) using any form of technology (e.g., phone, videoconferencing, email, or other forms of digital messaging) to facilitate or provide care.**

CPSO does not determine which virtual care platforms can be used to provide care. Not all conditions can be treated virtually, and virtual care may not be appropriate in each instance. Doctors do have to consider your preference for either in-person or virtual care, where possible, but they can only provide you with virtual care if it's in your best interest to do so.

The [Continuity of Care Guide for Patients and Caregivers](#) can be used to help patients and caregivers understand doctors' responsibilities around continuity of care and outlines steps you can take to complement doctors' efforts.



## » What can you do to prepare for a virtual appointment?

### Try booking an appointment with your family doctor before you book with a virtual walk-in clinic.

- While convenience is one factor to consider, there are benefits to seeing your family doctor since they know your medical history and past management in detail.
- If you can't see your family doctor, ask the doctor that you do see to [send a record of your visit](#) to your family doctor's office or give you a copy of the record of the encounter.

### Consider whether your current health concern or complaint needs in-person care.

- For example, virtual care may be appropriate for minor conditions (e.g., localized rash, minor urinary symptoms) or stable chronic conditions (e.g., medication changes).
- In-person care is required when you have severe symptoms (e.g., chest pain, shortness of breath, loss of vision, weakness or numbness) or when the doctor needs to examine the area of concern (e.g., earache, joint injury).

### Check for any applicable costs or fees associated with using the virtual care platform or service.

- Virtual care is covered in a lot of instances, but doctors can [charge a reasonable fee](#) for services that aren't covered by OHIP. Doctors must tell you how much a service will cost before they provide it.
- More information on billing can be found in CPSO's [Uninsured Services: Billing and Block Fees Patient Information Sheet](#).

Many virtual care platforms require downloading an application or software before the appointment. Video calls typically need stable Internet, and it's a good idea to test your connection before the appointment. If you can't connect by video, you can ask your doctor to connect by phone instead.



### » Before your virtual care encounter, your doctor must:

- Be able to provide quality care to you virtually using the chosen technology.
- Consider the nature of your health concern or complaint and the care required, your health status and specific needs, your circumstances and preferences, and the technology available to you.
- Determine that it's appropriate to provide virtual care and that it's in your best interest.



### » During your virtual care encounter, your doctor must:

- Be able to provide you with their contact information in case you need to reach them after your appointment.
- Explain the appropriateness, limitations, and privacy considerations related to virtual care to you during your first virtual encounter with them and get your consent to proceed.
- Make sure that you are aware of anyone else who might be participating in the virtual care encounter (such as a nurse, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant).
- Consider whether virtual care is the most appropriate way to provide you with care:
  - o If an in-person assessment (e.g., physical examination) is necessary, they must arrange for a timely in-person assessment or direct you to alternative options in the community.
  - o If the technology or connection fails and your doctor is not able to complete the virtual care encounter, they must follow up with you and/or reschedule the appointment.



### » After your virtual care encounter, your doctor must:

- [Create](#) and [maintain](#) a medical record that captures the virtual encounter in the same way they would if they provided you with in-person care.
- Make sure that you can access your medical record and that it is available to other health-care providers who may be providing you with ongoing care and treatment (if requested).
- Communicate appropriately with other health-care providers involved in your care, where necessary.

## Questions?

CPSO's [Virtual Care](#) policy sets out expectations for Ontario doctors, with additional guidance in the [Virtual Care: Advice to the Profession](#) companion document.

You can contact [CPSO's Patient & Public Help Centre](#) if you have questions about virtual care that you received:

**Phone:** (416) 967-2603 / 1-800-268-7096 ext. 603 (Toll-Free)

**Email:** [feedback@cpso.on.ca](mailto:feedback@cpso.on.ca)

You can also visit [CPSO's Doctor Search](#) to confirm a doctor's registration status.

## Additional resources:

- Ontario Health's Checklist for [Use of Virtual Care for Patients \(PDF & Word\)](#) and [Learning About Virtual Care Options for Patients \(PDF & Word\)](#)
- Canadian Medical Association, College of Family Physicians of Canada, and Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada's [Virtual Care Guide for Patients](#)