



Optometry Practice Re-Activation Preparedness Guide

The emergence of COVID-19 has created unparalleled challenges for everyone, including doctors of optometry. Shelter-in-place declarations and stay-at-home orders have limited practices to urgent and emergent care only. Based on updated reports, social distancing and the cessation of normal and routine activities that involve people being within six feet of each other is believed to be slowing the spread of the greatest public health dilemma that our country, and the world, has seen in our lifetime.

This pandemic, by all accounts, is a temporary event and you will be able to re-activate your practices in the near future. Yet, as physical distancing is eased, a rapid increase in the number of patients seeking routine eye and vision health care is anticipated. You will need to be fully prepared today for the actions you take tomorrow.

It is important to reinforce that, as a doctor, your judgement and decisions—informed by guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Optometric Association (AOA) and federal, state and local governments and officials—should direct how your practice operates each day.

Below are suggested steps to prepare your practice, staff and patients for a safe return to delivering the full range of essential eye health and vision care Americans need.

- **Anticipate when you will return to a normal (or a *new normal*) schedule.**
 - a. Watch for communications and updated information from the AOA for national trends and changes.
 - b. Closely monitor all federal, state and local guidance related to routine versus urgent and emergent care and when changes can be expected.
 - c. Monitor updates and communicate frequently with your state optometric association regarding guidance from the state board of optometry.
 - d. Utilize the time now to evaluate and assess your practice and identify opportunities to enhance the practice moving forward. This includes, but is not limited to, all clinical and non-clinical services, office purchasing and staff roles and responsibilities critical to office recovery and optimization (e.g., scheduling all available open slots and increased/staggered available office hours).
 - e. Connect with county and city health board/officers regarding guidance and alert them of your plans for reopening.

- f. Communicate with local medical offices, surgery centers and hospitals to inform them that you are planning to open for emergent and non-emergent care, consultation and referrals.
- **Develop an action plan for your staff to bring the practice back up to full speed before you open your doors for both routine and emergency care.**
 - a. Consult guidance from the [CDC](#) and the [U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) regarding infection prevention measures and begin a plan to implement appropriate protocols within your office.
 - i. [CDC Clinic Preparedness Guidance](#)
 - b. Determine priorities for preparing office space and clinical areas based on suggested guidelines for cleaning and sanitizing the medical office and dispensary, and how long this process may take.
 - i. Ensure you have a clear process on sterilizing all equipment and materials, including frames.
 - c. Map out how you will triage and prioritize those patients that require urgent or emergent care, those with original appointments and those that need to be rescheduled.
 - d. Take stock of existing supplies and work to anticipate adequate needs moving forward to maintain recommended levels of cleanliness and sanitization.
 - e. Ensure clinical and non-clinical staff have appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) including facemasks, gloves and eye protection; have access to germicidal wipes; and have an ample supply of hand sanitizer and soap and water.
 - i. Staff should receive job-specific training on PPE and demonstrate competency with selection and proper use of PPE (e.g., putting on and removing without self-contamination).
 - ii. [Refer to AOAExcel for important information regarding PPE access](#)
 - f. Develop screening protocols for staff and patients.
 - i. Optometric practices should screen patients, visitors and staff members for symptoms of COVID-19 prior to and/or upon their arrival at the facility, including utilizing non-contact temperature readers.
 - ii. Any staff member showing signs of being sick should not be permitted to work and should be referred to their primary care provider.
 - 1. [CDC Symptoms of Coronavirus](#)
 - iii. Patients and visitors exhibiting signs of being sick should be rescheduled, unless an emergency dictates otherwise, and referred to their primary care provider.
 - g. Outline workload plans for staff so as to prepare for cleaning and sanitizing, while safely keeping up with patient flow as best as possible.
 - h. Identify strategies for your office that manage patient flow and ensure appropriate physical distancing, including, but not limited to:

- i. Re-evaluate office flow and waiting area capacity.
 - ii. Request patients call or text the office upon arrival so entrance to and movement through the facility can be coordinated by staff.
 - iii. Instruct patients that companions should remain outside of the facility and not accompany the patient into the facility unless they are a parent/guardian of the patient or if they are a true caregiver and need to assist the patient.
 - iv. Establish a longer timeframe in between patient appointments.
 - i. Utilize this time out of office for staff education and re-education and training.
 - i. [AOA's EyeLearn](#) has resources for paraoptometric professionals for development; with staffing models potentially changing, cross-training may also be beneficial.
- **Develop a new system for sterilization of the office, based on all available guidelines. Patient safety protocols are critical to patient-centric care moving forward.**
 - a. Opening cleaning protocol.
 - b. Closing cleaning protocol.
 - c. Equipment and exam room cleaning protocol in between patients.
- **Continue messaging to your patients.**
 - a. Reach out to them during this difficult time to see how they are doing through all relevant communications channels (e.g., website, social media, email, direct mail, advertising).
 - b. Update your website, social media channels and phone voicemail to communicate that your office is open for eye health and vision care and use the opportunity to reinforce the importance for the care you deliver and how you are taking steps to protect patient and staff health and safety.
 - c. Remind your patients, when relevant, you are open for essential routine and urgent care, emergencies, telehealth consultations, questions and concerns.
 - i. Ensure that all communications reinforce your practice safety protocols.
 - d. Based on expectations for a return to routine care, begin booking routine appointments for an anticipated day one re-activation and beyond (be sure to make patients aware there remains a chance the limited schedule order may not be lifted).
 - e. When appropriate for patients, consider utilizing telehealth to prioritize in-patient care for those who have urgent needs.
 - f. Contact and check up on your complex patients.
 - i. Diabetic retinopathy
 - ii. Glaucoma
 - iii. Age-related macular degeneration
 - iv. Complex contact lens patients (e.g., scleral)
 - v. Myopia management patients

- vi. Refractive surgery referrals
 - vii. Patients that refer
 - g. Identify patients whose care has been postponed.
 - i. Individuals referred for non-urgent surgery and/or routine care
 - ii. Alert those who may need to reschedule or restart their authorization and scheduling process
- **Prepare for your staff needs as they assimilate into the new working environment.**
 - a. Demonstrate consideration for the mental health of the staff and team while re-establishing the new care delivery flow.
 - b. Strategies to reduce stress and potential burn out may include:
 - i. Ensure a positive work environment.
 - ii. Eliminate or reduce tasks that are not contributing to improved patient care.
 - iii. Facilitate access to support programs, if possible.
 - iv. Encourage balance.
 - v. Communicate, communicate, communicate.
- **Contact other medical practices in the area to see when they will be re-opening or if they have new protocols in place.**
 - a. Sub-specialty ophthalmology for referrals.
 - b. Local emergency departments for referrals.
- **Post signage in the office of the new steps and protocols to ensure maximum safety.**
- **Utilize AOA resources.**
 - a. [AOA COVID-19 Hub](#)
 - b. [AOA Excel](#)
 - c. [Patient Resources](#)
 - d. [AOA EyeLearn](#)
- **Celebrate re-opening the practice!**

This remains an evolving situation and AOA encourages doctors of optometry to continue to consult the CDC and federal, state and local governments and officials for guidance. Doctors can visit [AOA's Coronavirus resource](#) for the latest information.

ACCESS TO PPE FOR OPTOMETRY PRACTICES

The urgent nationwide shortage of supplies of PPE for frontline, essential care providers, including doctors of optometry, is placing America's health care workforce and the public at further risk. The AOA is among the leading national health care organizations actively urging the president, congress and equipment suppliers to immediately focus on and fix this dire situation.

DURING THE NATIONWIDE SHORTAGE:

Due to the efforts of states, localities and public health organizations, and through federal prioritization and targeting efforts, PPE supplies are being directed to outbreak hotspots and potential future hotspots. Doctors are advised to explore current availability of quality PPE through state and local agencies as well as other immediate term sources.

NEXT STEPS FOR SECURING PPE FOR OPTOMETRY PRACTICES:

Looking beyond the current nationwide shortage, AOA doctors are advised that AOAExcel's (www.ExcelOD.com) exclusive group purchasing organization (GPO) partner, Intalere, is positioned to gain assured, long-term access to steady supplies of hospital-grade, quality controlled PPE at competitive pricing. This is an AOA member benefit.

- **For doctors/practices already enrolled in AOAExcel's GPO program:** You may directly contact Intalere's Operational Continuity & Emergency Management team at 877-711-5600 for the latest information on PPE availability and access. (Intalere member number is required. If not known, it can be accessed by contacting the AOAExcel team at aoaexcel@aoa.org).
- **For doctors/practices not yet enrolled in AOAExcel's GPO program:** [Click here](#) to provide basic registration information. The enrollment process will be completed within four business days. To get started or for other assistance, contact the AOAExcel team at aoaexcel@aoa.org.