

# FAQ for Patients on Resuming Care During and Post-Pandemic

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## Is it safe to return to my doctor’s office for routine, non-COVID, or chronic disease management care?

It is more important than ever to take care of your health, especially chronic conditions, like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and lung disease. Cancer screening and immunizations are also crucial to your continued health. Some routine care may be able to wait, but other issues are important to address quickly.

You should contact your physician's office to ask if your care can be managed by phone or video, called telemedicine, or if it will require an in-person visit. Many issues can be managed virtually, but not all. Remember, never wait to seek care for an emergency.

If you have not been keeping up with your care over the last few months, multiple visits may be necessary to get your care back on track and make sure any chronic diseases are under control.

## Is it better for me to schedule a telemedicine visit or an in-person visit? When do I absolutely need to go to the doctor's office in-person?

### Virtual/Telemedicine Visit

These visits allow you to use a phone or desktop device to speak with your physician. Examples of when telemedicine may be appropriate include:

- Minor illnesses, like a cold or sinus infection
- Minor injuries, like small cuts or sprains
- Non-severe symptoms from a chronic condition
- General health concerns or questions
- Annual wellness visits

Influenza-like illnesses, including COVID-like symptoms, can also usually be addressed by phone first.

### In-Person Visit

There are times where it will be best to see your doctor in person for more complex and personalized care. For example:

- Cancer screenings and treatments
- Complex chronic disease care
- Surgical procedures
- Vaccines
- Certain worrisome symptoms including fever, stomach pain, pelvic pain, chest pain, headache, weakness, numbness, a mass or abscess, or warm and swollen joints

Call your physician's office first to explain your symptoms and see what they recommend. You may also be able to start with a telemedicine visit and convert to an in-person visit if necessary. Serious life-threatening symptoms like chest pain, severe shortness of breath, new onset weakness, severe allergic reaction or major trauma may require a visit to the emergency room.

## Is telemedicine covered by my insurance?

Telemedicine visits, including both video visits and phone calls, are currently covered by most insurers. Co-pays may apply. Call your insurance provider to check on their policies, which have been continually changing to meet pandemic needs.

## How do I conduct a telemedicine visit with my doctor?

Usually, all you need is a mobile phone, tablet, or desktop/laptop computer with video capability. You will need a working internet connection if you use a tablet or computer. If you do not have access to a tablet computer or other computer device, or if you don't have access to the internet, ask if a telephone visit will work.

Be sure to have your medications with you during the telemedicine visit. Write down any questions or concerns you have prior to the visit. Test your internet connection and your

device's camera to be sure it is working and the device is fully charged or connected to a power source prior to the visit.

## If I have to go to an in-person visit, what is my doctor's office doing to keep me safe?

All medical offices are being encouraged to put safety measures in place to keep their patients, and staff, as safe as possible. Some things you might encounter when you return to your physician's office include:

- Special hours (early morning or evening appointments) for older and vulnerable patients.
- Less waiting time. Some offices will send you a text alert when it's your turn to come back, so you can wait for your appointment in your car or outside of the building.
- If you will wait in a waiting room, it might look different. Expect to see chairs spaced apart, Plexiglas shields, and no shared reading material.
- Separate space for those experiencing COVID-related symptoms or other respiratory complaints.
- Care staff wearing personal protective equipment; always masks, but they may also be wearing face shields/goggles, gowns and gloves.
- Requiring all staff to have temperature and symptom checks prior to coming into the office.
- Requiring patients to wear masks at all times and submit to temperature and symptom checks prior to appointments.
- Office procedures that limit the number of staff you have to interact with.
- Patient exam rooms that reduce unnecessary contact with in-room surfaces.
- Pre-visit lab testing. This will help make virtual and live visits more productive and cut down on the need for follow up communication.
- Careful cleaning and disinfecting protocols for all equipment that is used between patients.

## Do I have to wear a mask?

Yes. Please wear a mask or cloth face covering during your appointment. This will protect your health, the health of the healthcare staff, and the health of other patients. If you do not have a mask, visit the [CDC website](#) to see how to make your own out of things you have around your house. If you do not have a mask when you arrive for your appointment, the practice will provide one for you.

## Will I need to have a COVID test prior to my appointment?

It is unlikely everyone will be required to have a test for COVID-19 administered prior to their appointment. However, your physician's office will take your temperature and ask you about any symptoms or recent possible exposure to COVID-19. If they suspect you have been infected, they may inform you how to be tested.

## Can I bring a family member or caregiver to my appointment? What about my children?

Limit companions to only those whose participation in the appointment is necessary based on your personal situation. Many health care institutions have formal policies about visitors. Call your doctor's office before your visit to learn what their policy is. If you have no choice but to bring your child or other companion, they should also wear a mask and expect to follow the same screening protocols, including a temperature check and symptom questionnaire.

## How can I get to my appointment? I don't want to take public transportation!

Call your physician's office to see if your appointment can be conducted via telemedicine. If an in-person visit is essential, and you have specific transportation needs, call the office to problem solve and see if there are additional resources or alternative transportation options they can offer.

## When can I expect to have my elective procedure/surgeries?

Different states have different directives about when they can resume elective procedures and surgeries. Contact your physician's office to ask about whether or not you are able to have your procedure at this time, or when you can expect to have it.

## Can I get a COVID test or an antibody test?

Visit the [CDC's Testing for COVID-19 page](#) or contact your physician's office about whether or not you can and should obtain a COVID test to see if you currently have the infection, or an antibody test to see if you have already been infected by the virus. It is important to understand that these tests are not 100% accurate. Sometimes they are negative in patients who are infected or have been infected.

## What if I think or know I had COVID and have other questions?

Visit the [CDC's Coronavirus Disease 2019 FAQ page](#), which is updated frequently, to find an answer to other common questions related to COVID-19.