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# GUIDANCE FOR OPTOMETRISTS REGARDING COVID-19

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The overarching obligation of the New Jersey State Board of Optometrists is to protect the public's health, safety and welfare. That includes everyone: the people who live and work here, those who pass through and, of course, the optometrists, their patients and their staff.

The emergence of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and its now rapid spread throughout communities in New Jersey, the nation and the world is unprecedented and has raised many questions and concerns by optometrists and the public.

The Board has been actively monitoring recommendations of federal, state, and public and private entities, and has been working closely with other government agencies to develop the recommendations found here. **The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has recommended that health care providers, including optometrists, defer all routine in-person eye care visits. Previously scheduled appointments should likewise be cancelled. This would include all visits for elective procedures. Failure to do so would expose your patients, staff and yourself to unnecessary and inappropriate risks of transmission of COVID-19. Appointments should be rescheduled only upon clearance from public health authorities.**

Licensees are particularly urged to closely monitor CDC advisories, and to limit their ongoing practices in a manner consistent with any advice that has been or may hereafter be provided by the CDC, and in accordance with all Orders that may be issued during the state of emergency by the State and/or Federal government. At this time, there is no mandate that licensees postpone visits for urgent or emergency care. The American Optometric Association (the "AOA") is suggesting that urgent and emergency visits should be prioritized and conducted in a manner that will ensure staff and patient safety. The Board relies on the training and experience of licensed optometrists to review available advisories and to consider available information when distinguishing between urgent and non-urgent visits.

In the current patient care environment, licensees should follow CDC guidelines for infection control, including all CDC guidelines for the use of personal protective equipment ("PPE"), as appropriate. If there is a recommendation that care be provided only with PPE, and you do not have access to the recommended PPE, you should not see the patient and instead make a referral to another practitioner who can provide care in a manner consistent with CDC guidelines.

The Board reminds you that failure to act in a manner consistent with the best interests of your patients, and more broadly society at large, could subject you to disciplinary action by the Board.

The CDC's recommendations, and/or limitations imposed by State or Federal mandates, may change in the upcoming days and weeks. You are urged to check the Board's website frequently for updates.

We trust that you appreciate the need for the issuance of this advisory, and that you will act in a manner consistent with the advice set forth herein.

Renee Clark  
Executive Director  
New Jersey State Board of Optometrists