

10 Simple Steps to Consider when Reopening Optometric Practice

1. **Communicate Your Safety Plan** : Explain how the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Works to every patient and every staff member. NYS has mandated that we provide face covering for all employees.

Executive Order 202.16, issued on April 12, 2020: For all essential businesses or entities, any employees who are present in the workplace shall be provided and shall wear face coverings when in direct contact with customers or members of the public. Businesses must provide, at their expense, such face coverings for their employees.

Guidance for choosing and proper use of PPE in clinical care can be found here
<https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/ppe/ppeslides6-29-04.pdf>

2. **Stagger Patients**: Try not to overlap appointments – Ramp-up slowly. Consider your space carefully. If you have multiple lanes, consider filling alternate rooms only, allowing for proper disinfection between patients and discouraging doctors and assistants from going back and forth between multiple patients.
3. **Modify Appointment Confirmation**: Explain new safety policies over phone, email, or text confirmation messages. Prescreen patients by asking if they have any symptoms of fever or malaise. Consider sending all questionnaires and forms in advance of the appointment and having the patient complete electronic forms, or if that is impossible, arrive with prefilled paper forms to the appointment. If insurance cards are routinely handled in your office, ask patients to send a photo of the front and back of the card before they arrive. Consider implementing touchless pay terminals such as apple pay. Limit the amount of time the patient spends in common areas of your clinic and reduce cross contamination risk from clipboards, pens, cards, etc.
4. **Remote Patient Check-In**: Aim to check-in patients over the phone. Patients wait to be called-in for their appointment only once the previous patient is gone and sanitation is complete.
5. **Restrict Entry**: Only patients may enter office for appointment. Spouses, friends, caregivers, and parents need to wait outside unless it is absolutely necessary for the caregiver to be present. They can assist the patient to the front door and hand off to a welcoming technician. Consider having that technician screen the patient for fever, direct them to a hand washing or sanitizing station, and then directly into an examination or pre-test room. While screening temperatures may be awkward, remember you are not diagnosing the patient based on temperature. You are simply protecting yourself, your team and your patients. Remind the patients that EVERYONE, including yourself and your staff, pass this screening daily for everyone's safety. When possible, rearrange the seating in your waiting rooms to conform to social distancing.
6. **Remove Non-Essential Items**: Anatomical models, flyers, brochures, displays, magazines, books, toys, etc. should be removed to reduce cross-contamination.

7. **Deliveries:** All supply deliveries from package carriers or optical suppliers should be accepted outside and sanitized once inside the practice.
8. **Contact Lens Disinfection:** Post current contact lens disinfection protocols for all medically necessary fitting sets. Review correct procedures with all staff.
9. **Sanitization Technician / Environmental Assistant:** Consider training a roaming optometric assistant for this new position. They are responsible for sanitizing all touchpoints before and after patient contact, with appropriate, manufacturer-recommended and CDC-approved surface disinfectants. All ophthalmic frames that the patient has handled must be disinfected before being replaced for display. Review safe methods of disinfection for each type of frame material but consider that the following method may be acceptable for most ophthalmic frames: Used frames are placed into a tray, washed in hot soapy water, dried, then placed into a UV sterilizer for 3-5 minutes (nail salon type). The trays are then wiped down with alcohol before being reused. If you choose to do this, remember that most UV-C bulbs usually last less than 9000 hours until they become ineffective. They should be replaced at minimum every 6 months.
10. **Contact Lens Fitting and Training Sessions:** Consider delaying non-essential contact lens fitting and training until the pandemic has subsided or until reliable testing is readily available. With proper hand hygiene, contact lenses are safe to wear but the prolonged direct contact between patient, doctor, and/or technician during the I&R training session may pose significant risk for viral transmission.