

Learn about Virtual Visits for Healthcare

What is virtual care?

Virtual care uses technology like telephone, video, email, and secure messaging to help you connect with or talk to your healthcare provider when you're not in the same place. Sometimes in-person visits aren't needed or possible. You can have a virtual visit using telephone or video calls.

Your healthcare provider may ask you to think about virtual care as an option for your next visit or you may just want to learn more about virtual care. This information can help you decide if you'd like to try this. If this type of visit doesn't work for you, tell your healthcare provider and they will talk with you about other options so you can keep getting the care you need.

Benefits of virtual care

Virtual care is an easy way for you to connect with your healthcare provider using telephone, video, email, or secure messaging. This is helpful when in-person appointments must be limited like:

- during the COVID-19 pandemic
- you live far away from your healthcare provider's clinic
- you can't get to and from appointments easily

Limitations of virtual care

- Some services, like minor procedures, are not available by virtual care. Your healthcare provider will work with you to make sure you get these services in other ways if needed.
- Sometimes there may be technology issues, like problems with internet connections, dropped calls, poor video or audio quality, or frozen screens. Your healthcare provider will arrange a back-up plan for how to connect if any of these problems happen during your appointment.
- Alberta Health Services (AHS) doesn't charge any extra fees for virtual care. You can contact your internet or cellular service provider to find out if there are any fees from them if you use video calls.
- AHS is not responsible for internet or cellular service fees that may result from data or service use when you connect with this type of visit. Check first so that you avoid unexpected costs.

Is virtual care private?

- Your privacy is important. AHS uses secure systems to support virtual care. Any personal or health information collected during your virtual visit is protected and used only for purposes allowed by the Health Information Act. It's used to provide for your care or treatment. Your healthcare provider keeps this information secure and private.
- When you have a virtual care visit with your healthcare provider, it's important for you to be in a quiet, private space so your health information will only be heard or seen by those you choose.

What is a virtual visit?

A virtual visit uses the telephone or video as a way for you to meet with your healthcare provider when an in-person visit isn't necessary or possible.

How can I prepare for a virtual visit?

- Your clinic will give you information and instructions about what to do for your virtual visit. This will include:
 - what type of equipment you'll need (like a telephone, smartphone, computer, or tablet)
 - who to contact if you can't connect or the technology isn't working for you
- Plan the virtual visit around other activities to be sure you are in a safe space where you can focus your undivided attention on the appointment (not driving or distracted in any other way).
- Follow the instructions about the technology or device you need. In most cases, the connection can be tested ahead of time on your smartphone, tablet, or computer.
- Find a private, quiet, and well-lit area so that your healthcare provider will be able to hear and see you well. Privacy is important so that your conversation won't be overheard by other people.

How does a virtual visit start?

- At the beginning of your virtual visit, you and your healthcare provider will identify yourselves to each other as well as the reason for your visit.
- You'll be asked if you still want to have your visit this way (virtual visit).
- Your healthcare provider may ask for another way to contact you, in case your session gets disconnected.
- If you have a family member or someone you trust with you during your virtual visit, please introduce them to your healthcare provider.
- Most virtual visits won't be recorded. If recording is felt to be important, your healthcare provider must get your permission in advance and let you know when the recording starts and stops.

How can I make the most of my virtual visit?

- If at any time you feel that a virtual visit is not right for you, tell your healthcare provider. The session can be stopped. You and your healthcare provider can talk about a different way for you to get the healthcare you need.
- Your virtual visit will follow a similar process as an in-person visit. You and your healthcare provider can talk about things the same as if you were in the same room. For example:
 - any questions you have (share these early in the session)
 - how you're feeling
 - get or give health information or education
 - review your treatment plan
 - discuss care options

There may be times when the virtual visit limits what your healthcare provider can do for you. They may want to see you in-person. They'll work with you to arrange for a different type of visit at a later date.

If you have questions about your virtual care before, during, or after any visit, or if you want to have an in-person visit, contact your healthcare provider or clinic.

This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction, or treatment. If you have questions, talk with your healthcare provider.
