

Virtual Cancer Clinic Appointments Information for Patients & Families



Your main sources of information on COVID-19 and health are at [Alberta.ca](https://alberta.ca), albertahealthservices.ca/COVID and Canada.ca

What is virtual healthcare?

Virtual healthcare is care provided using technology such as the telephone, video call or online platform, rather than in person.

What is a virtual cancer clinic appointment?

A [virtual cancer clinic appointment](#) is a clinic appointment with a cancer care provider using technology. Like a regular clinic visit where patients come for consultation, advice or treatment planning, the virtual clinic visit provides the same service, just **not in person**.

Can we use a video-based service like Zoom or Skype?

Because we are moving such a large number of in person visits to virtual clinic visits, we are focusing on only using the phone for now.

Some departments, such as our psychosocial oncology teams, are working to set up video appointments as face-to-face connection is important in providing counselling and mental health services.

If your care team is using one of these online platforms, they will make sure you can connect with the technology first. It's also important to know that Alberta Health Services (AHS) uses a more secure version of Zoom and Skype for video appointments with patients. Here are resources that can help you:

- [Patient Support for Zoom](#)
- [Healthcare Video Visits](#) – Information for Patients and Families
- [Privately Joining a Zoom Group Session](#)

Why is Cancer Care Alberta (CCA) moving some patients to virtual clinic appointments?

Having cancer and being treated for cancer can affect people's ability to fight off infections. When the immune system is low or weak, the risk for getting an infection is high. This is called being **immunocompromised**.

In order to protect patients and families during the current COVID-19 pandemic, CCA is moving to virtual clinic appointments where possible. Unless you are sick with COVID-19, you always have a choice to accept or decline a virtual clinic appointment.

Moving to virtual clinic appointments:

- decreases your risk of exposure to viruses and bacteria by decreasing the number of times you come to the hospital or cancer centre.
- allows you to remain in the comfort of your home while still receiving some of the healthcare you need.

Is everyone moving to virtual clinic appointments?

No, it is not possible to manage all healthcare virtually. We still need to meet in person sometimes. Your clinic team will contact you if they think you are a good candidate for a virtual appointment. You will still need to come in for an in person clinic visit if:

- your cancer care team need to measure and record your height and weight to be able to give you the right dose of drug.
- you need a physical assessment.
- you are unable to get the answers you need from us over the phone.
- we cannot communicate well enough over the phone (for example, if there is a language barrier or a hearing problem).
- you are not comfortable with a virtual clinic appointment or do not agree with having a virtual clinic appointment.

If you need an interpreter, we can set up a call with our Language Line. Please let us know.

Note: If we are proceeding with your scheduled appointment as an in person appointment, we will call you before your appointment to ask you some COVID screening questions.

How will I be contacted?

- If your clinic team identifies you as a good fit for a virtual appointment, someone from the clinic will call you to talk with you, get your permission for a virtual clinic appointment and give you information.
- You will need to answer questions to verify your identity (such as confirming your date of birth, address, cancer card number or healthcare number).

Note: You may receive more than 1 phone call. Please be patient with us as we change our processes and move to virtual clinic appointments. This is also new for us and we are making this change during a difficult time.

How can I prepare for my virtual clinic appointment?

To make the most of your virtual clinic appointment, we recommend you:

- know how to use the **speakerphone** function on your phone. This will allow you to put down the phone so you can take notes. It will also allow a family member or support person to hear what is being said if you wish to have someone else on the call with you.

- plan to be in a quiet space or room to take the call. Turn off your tv, radio, music, kitchen appliances or other sources of noise in advance so that you and your cancer care provider can hear each other well.
- plan to have a family member or support person ready to take the call with you, if you wish.
- have a pen and a pad of paper or notebook ready to write things down.
- write down any questions you want to ask.
- be honest about any symptoms, side effects or problems you are having. It is okay if you feel you need to see us in person. We will work with you to provide the care you need.
- use a smart phone to record the conversation using the secure, Alberta Health Service (AHS) approved **My Care Conversation** app (page 4 for details). You will need a second device (smartphone, tablet, or iPod) to do this. Be sure to let your healthcare provider know before you start recording.

What if I need or choose to come in person for a clinic visit?

It is okay to want or need to see your cancer care provider in person. We may also request to see you in person if we believe it is important for your healthcare.

If you are coming in person, AHS staff are working hard to keep you safe. We are screening patients and staff upon entering the buildings and taking all the precautions necessary to decrease the spread of COVID-19.

If you need to come to the cancer centre, we will ask that you:

- **please come alone** (you may bring 1 person to your **first consult appointment only**).
- follow all physical distancing recommendations.
- use hand sanitizer immediately upon entering.
- put on a mask.

My Care Conversations app

Alberta Health Services supports your right to audio record clinical conversations.

Use the My Care Conversations app to:

- help you remember what you talked about by recording your clinic conversations.
- share the recording later with trusted family and friends.
- add your own typed notes.

For more information on the benefits and features, visit www.ahs.ca and search “My Care Conversations.” It has important security features to keep your information safe.

! Please note: If you plan to record your virtual clinic appointment, you cannot speak and record at the same time on the same phone.



Instead you can:

- Take the call from your care team on 1 phone (a home phone or smart phone).
- Place the call on speakerphone.
- Place a second device (phone, iPod, tablet, iPad) next to the phone you are using for the call. You should have the My Care Conversations app already downloaded.
- Turn on the app on the second device and follow the instructions.

Remember to:

- let your healthcare provider know you plan to record the conversation with the My Care Conversation app.
- let your healthcare provider know before you start recording.