

Patient updates

October 22, 2021

Dear patients,

We are writing to review our virtual and in-person visit options for a health-care appointment. You can now directly book an in-person appointment with your doctor or NP if that is your preference. In this communication, we will share information about:

- Guidance for booking virtual appointments:
 - What is a virtual appointment?
 - How you book a virtual appointment
 - How to prepare for your virtual appointment
 - What types of concerns can be addressed virtually?
- What types of concerns should be assessed in person?
- What to do if you have cold/flu/COVID symptoms
- When should you visit an emergency room

Patients can be seen for in person appointments in our clinics regardless of vaccination status.

Guidance for booking virtual appointments

What is a virtual appointment?

A virtual appointment with your provider happens over the telephone or video conference rather than in-person. Virtual appointments can be a safe, effective, and convenient way for you and your family to access care for many common health issues.

If English isn't your first language, translation services provided over the phone are available to support your virtual appointments. If you wish to use this service

for you or your family member, please let us know when you book an appointment.

How you book a virtual appointment

You can book a virtual appointment by calling or emailing (email: fhtbookings@smh.ca) your clinic. When you do this, please indicate what type of appointment you are requesting (virtual or in-person) along with the reason for your visit.

In some cases, your doctor or NP may still ask you to schedule a virtual visit first before being seen in clinic in person. The person you speak to will be able to let you know if this is the case.

How to prepare for your virtual appointment

Here are a few tips to remember when taking part in a virtual medical appointment:

- You MUST physically be in Ontario during your virtual visit. If you are not, you will need to seek care from a physician where you are located.
- You will be provided with a time for your virtual appointment. Your provider may call you earlier or later than the specified appointment time, so please be sure you are close by your phone/computer/tablet at least 15 minutes before and 30 minutes after the specified time.
- The caller ID may say “St Michael’s Hospital” or “Unknown Number”.
- Please ensure you are in a private space where you feel comfortable sharing your health information. It may be better to request an in-person appointment if you don’t have a private space available to you.
- Your provider may ask you to send photos, forms, or complete an online questionnaire before or after your virtual appointment. Please monitor your email for these requests.

What types of health concerns may be effectively assessed through a virtual appointment?

Below are some examples of medical concerns that can be safely assessed initially with a virtual visit:

- * Acne
- * Allergy symptoms - Nose/Eyes
- * Blood test requests
- * Bug Bites
- * Chronic conditions that are stable (e.g., heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease, asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity)
- * Cold sores or lip issues
- * Contraception
- * Eye issues - e.g., pink eye, styes (go to nearest emergency department if having sudden vision changes)
- * Fatigue
- * Form/Document completion requests
- * Lice
- * Mental health issues (e.g., mood changes, anxiety)
- * Prescription renewals (in most circumstances; please note that renewals for controlled substances such as stimulants, opioids, and benzodiazepines may require an in-person appointment)
- * Rash or skin concerns (option available to send photos in advance of visit for provider review; please do not send photos of genitalia or other sensitive areas)
- * Referral requests for physiotherapy, massage, chiropractic, or other allied health discipline
- * Shingles
- * Sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing
- * Smoking cessation or substance use questions (e.g., alcohol, cannabis, other drugs)
- * Test result review
- * Urinary symptoms
- * Vaccine questions or forms

If after the virtual visit your provider has any additional questions or needs to see you in person, they will ask you to book an in-person visit after your conversation.

If you're not sure whether you need to see your provider in-person, you may book a virtual appointment to speak with your provider first.

Regardless of your concern if you're not able to do a virtual appointment or prefer to be seen in-person, please let the booking staff know when making your appointment request.

What types of health concerns should be assessed in-person rather than virtually?

Some health concerns are better assessed in-person. These include things that your doctor or nurse practitioner would need to see or touch in order to make a diagnosis or provide treatment, including:

- *Abdominal pain
- *Breast, Genital, or Anorectal Issues
- *Ear issues
- *Immunization administration
- *Prenatal and well-baby visits

What to do if you have cold/flu/COVID symptoms?

As we enter cold and flu season, we know many people will begin to experience cold and flu symptoms. Many of these symptoms are the same as COVID symptoms. If this happens we encourage you to do the following:

- Call your clinic as usual if you are concerned about the severity or duration of your symptoms
- Visit the Ontario [COVID-19 self-assessment website](#)
- Get tested at a [COVID testing centre](#), regardless of whether you received your COVID-19 vaccine(s)

- Consider connecting with your employer to see if they may have COVID testing options available.
- If your child has cold and flu symptoms, you can ask for a testing kit from their school. Please connect with your child's school for more information.
- Call your clinic if you have any questions, concerns, or difficulties with the above process

When should you visit the emergency room?

There are also situations in which your symptoms may be potentially dangerous or life-threatening. **If you are experiencing the symptoms noted below, please dial 911 (or ask a family member/friend to dial 911).**

- * Severe chest pain
- * Severe shortness of breath
- * Continuous vomiting and inability to drink any fluids
- * Serious trauma or injuries (i.e., bleeding that won't stop, deep cuts, broken bones)
- * Sudden loss of vision
- * Sudden onset weakness of the face or arm/leg
- * Sudden inability to walk or talk

We are currently working hard to make improvements to the way we provide care. You may have noticed longer wait times on our phone lines while we make these changes. We appreciate your patience and encourage you to use email booking when possible. If you have email consent on file, please send an email to fhtbookings@smh.ca to book your appointment. We will be sending out more information about our clerical team, highlighting the services they provide next week.

Take care and be well.

SMHAFHT Leadership Team