

Doctor's Office Precautions

Q: How do I know if my Doctor's office is safe for me?

A: As our communities begin to re-open, many of us are worried about which activities are safe. Many have delayed outpatient medical visits because of the risk of being exposed to the COVID-19 virus at their Doctor's office. This concern is well-founded. In fact, it has been shown that there is a spike in influenza cases among previously well visitors 2 weeks after having visited a pediatrician's office. Obviously, this has potentially serious consequences in today's environment.

Healthcare workers have been implicated as a critical vector for virus transmission. Therefore, Doctors have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for patients. As long as important measures have been taken, there is no need to avoid seeking outpatient medical care; in fact, delaying evaluation and treatment could lead to progression in illness that could lead to more severe illness.

There are specific measures recommended by professional societies and the CDC. Some of these you should ask your Doctor's office about; many you can observe. If you are not subject to screenings and some restrictions, you can be certain that other, potentially infectious visitors were also not limited.

The following is a list of recommended mitigation strategies. Don't be afraid to ask. If your Doctor has invested time and money in these modifications, they'll be happy to discuss them. If they're reluctant, chances are you should be wary of visiting their office.

Source Control

- Patient screening, including temperature, symptoms, contacts, and pulse oximetry
- PCR testing for high-risk patients
- Mandatory masks
- Use of telehealth when possible to limit in-office traffic
- Restrictions against non-patient visitors

Staff

- Training in infection control measures
- Daily screening, periodic testing
- PPE, including n95 masks, gloves, eye protection, gowns

Facilities

- Limited or no use of the waiting room
- All toys, magazines, removed
- No unnecessary time at check-in, check-out counters, etc
- Exam rooms free of all but essential equipment
- CDC-compliant Airborne Infection Isolation Rooms for high-risk procedures and/or patients (dental, oral, nasal, and throat exams/procedures)
- Exam rooms should be cleaned/sanitized after patient use