

COVID-19 Updates as of March 24, 2020

1. Has the role of optometrists changed since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis?

a. Optometrists offer essential health care to the citizens of Florida. FOA has informed its members, from the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, that any OD who continues to practice should follow the guidelines set forth by the CDC: to follow and educate patients on contagious disease disinfection protocol, pre-screen all patients before setting an appointment, and use scheduling that allows for social distancing.

2. Does the executive order signed by Governor DeSantis last Friday change the CDC guideline for optometric care?

a. The executive order states that all elective non-life threatening surgeries or procedures are to be rescheduled. It does not change the practice of optometry as stated in our first answer. In fact, the following was released as part of a statement to from the Florida Chiropractors Association: "While the Governor's new Executive Order is of some ambiguity and we will continue to seek clarification, the Governor's press conference, along with the Introduction to EO 20-72, reveals the purpose of the Executive Order is to, 'conserve all medical supplies including personal protective equipment, or only that which is necessary to be used in response to this emergency...' At this time, we are recommending that, if a personal decision is made to keep your doors open, at this writing, you are free to do so." Similar guidance was released by the FMA, "providers can continue to see patients for the purpose of evaluation and management." See number 6.

3. What is being done about our FOA dues?

a. The Florida board of trustees is assessing the potential financial impact of the COVID-19 situation. As such, dues and the financial wellbeing of practicing ODs in our state is at the center of our attention. FOA is awaiting federal financial support legislation that could include operating expenses along with salary reimbursements for Florida optometrists. FOA has been told that information should be available this week. Rest assured, AOA and FOA will take care of our members based upon soon-to-be-released facts.

4. What is going to happen with the CE requirements in Florida?

a. The good news is, with almost a full year before licenses are to be renewed, there is time still time to get hours. Currently there is not a known end to the COVID-19 crisis, but the State Board of Optometry will address the issue when they meet. For information regarding CE, please visit floridasoptometry.gov.

5. New News

a. Governor Ron DeSantis announced that the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) has approved the first two Small Business Emergency Bridge Loans to businesses impacted by COVID-19.

b. The White House announced a new partnership to unleash U.S. supercomputing resources to fight COVID-19 and provide researchers worldwide with access to the world's most powerful high performance computing resources that can significantly advance the pace of scientific discovery in the fight to stop the virus.

c. Individuals whose employment has been negatively impacted as a result of the mitigation efforts in Florida to stop the spread of COVID-19 may be eligible to receive Reemployment Assistance.

d. All there is to know about Treasury and IRS including tax filing extensions, tax credits, paid leave, tax payment deferrals and more.

6. What does the FMA state?

Clarification on Executive Order 20-72 on Non-essential Elective Medical Procedures

The FMA interpretation of Executive Order 20-72 is that only medically unnecessary, non-urgent or non-emergency **procedures or surgeries** are prohibited. This has been confirmed by staff at the Florida Department of Health in communications to the FMA this morning.

The Department of Health also confirmed that Physicians can continue to see patients for purposes of evaluation and management. Telemedicine visits can continue unabated. Primary care practitioners can continue to see and treat patients with chronic and acute conditions, perform wellness exams, and provide mental health services, that do not consume personal protective equipment. Specialists can see patients for follow-up care and other non-surgical purposes.

The medical care prohibited under this order is:

- elective or non-medically necessary surgical procedures
- surgical procedures that can be postponed without putting the patient's immediate health, safety or well-being at risk
- medical procedures that would consume personal protective equipment, that can be postponed without putting the patient's immediate health, safety or well-being at risk

Physicians should [consult the CMS recommendations](#) for additional guidance.

We understand the negative impact this will have on countless physicians and their patients. The FMA will be here to help guide you through this unprecedented event. If you have any questions please contact the FMA General Counsel's office at legal@flmedical.org or call 850 224-6496.