



# PHA Connects: COVID-19 and Your Health



## TELEMEDICINE VISITS

### What is telemedicine?

Telemedicine most often refers to a remote medical visit by phone or computer. Patients use a computer with a camera or phone to speak with health care providers or call in using a toll-free number. A telemedicine visit allows patients to speak to members of their health care team about health concerns, review test results or discuss whether an office visit is necessary. Telemedicine allows health care providers to treat patients when needed and where the patient is located. Telemedicine also is known as telehealth, televisits or remote visits.

Telemedicine isn't a replacement for emergency medicine. **In the event of an emergency, dial 911.**

### Who uses telemedicine and why?

Patients in rural areas or those far from their health care providers may rely on telemedicine. Televisits also can be used during inclement

weather when travel may be difficult. This approach to health care is sometimes used in urban settings where there are not enough health care providers to meet patients' needs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many health care providers routinely use telemedicine for many kinds of care, including primary care, cardiology, pulmonology, physical therapy, mental health visits and psychotherapy sessions.

### What kind of technology is used?

Some physicians simply connect with patients by phone. Others use videoconferencing technology. This may be similar to applications you use to communicate with family, friends or coworkers, but telemedicine apps have privacy protections to secure your health information.

### Insurance and telemedicine

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Medicare has expanded options for health care providers and patients to use telemedicine and encourages telemedicine to aid in social distancing and to protect patients from exposure to COVID-19.

Many other types of insurance plans are covering telemedicine visits during the COVID-19 pandemic. In most cases, insurance copayments will be the same for in-person physician visits and telemedicine visits. Several insurance plans are waiving copayments during this time. Get more information here [www.ahip.org/health-insurance-providers-respond-to-coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.ahip.org/health-insurance-providers-respond-to-coronavirus-covid-19).

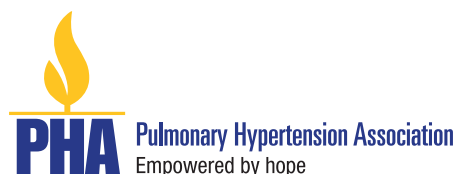
Patients should direct questions about insurance coverage for telemedicine visits to the customer service number on their health insurance cards or call their health care providers.

### What do you need for a telemedicine visit?

- Telemedicine visits may be conducted by telephone. If you have reliable internet and a device with a web camera (a computer, tablet or smartphone), you can conduct your visit by video conference via a secure link from your health care provider(s).
- A quiet location to have a telemedicine visit.
- A web link and/or phone number provided by your health care team.
- Questions for your health care team. Just as with an in-person visit, consider in advance your goals for the appointment and questions you want to ask.
- Information requested by your health care provider such as a telemedicine consent form. Your health care provider also might ask you to take your vital signs before the visit. If your provider requests your weight, pulse, temperature or respiration rate, ask how to safely and accurately collect this information at home.

### What to expect during a telemedicine visit

- **Technical difficulties.** These are normal, even for experienced technology users. A browser window might open slowly, or an internet or phone connection might be imperfect. Such issues are normal and require patience. Your health care team will support you and work with you to resolve any technical issues.
- **Great medical care.** Your health care team will have access to your medical record, and they will ask you the same kinds of questions they would in clinic. They will expect you to ask questions, too. Just like a clinic visit, telemedicine visits are most successful when patients fully communicate their questions and concerns to their health care provider(s).
- **Shared decision-making.** Just like a clinic visit, you and your health care provider(s) will make decisions together about your health care. For example, if you and your provider(s) determine that in-person evaluation is needed because of worsening symptoms, you and your team will share in the decision-making about scheduling a clinic visit and discuss necessary precautions to avoid spreading or contracting COVID-19. Or, you and your team may determine that you are doing well and will schedule a follow-up visit. Whatever your circumstances and whatever the outcome, you can expect to leave a telemedicine visit with a plan, just like you would when leaving the clinic.



### Make the most out of a telemedicine visit

While the COVID-19 pandemic is a stressful time, your visit is time that your health care provider is dedicating to you and your care. It's important to be direct, and express your concerns and questions so your provider can help keep you healthy.



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## Telemedicine Appointment Checklist

### Ask your PH care team these questions before scheduling a telemedicine visit:

- Is telemedicine an option for me? If I feel sick, will I need to be seen in-person?  
During the COVID-19 pandemic, your provider will weigh the risks and benefits of a telemedicine visit.
- Do I need to complete paperwork before the appointment? If so, how will I receive that?  
If you prefer not to complete forms online, ask if you can instead provide the information over the phone.
- What technology will I need for my telemedicine visit?
- Will my health insurance cover the telemedicine appointment?
- How will I be billed for the telemedicine visit?
- Will my prescriptions be refilled through my telemedicine visit?  
Medication refills: Many insurance plans are allowing early prescription refills and flexibility with refills available during the COVID-19 pandemic. Medicare prescription drug plans and Medicare Advantage Part D plans allow one-time, 90-day supplies of many covered medications. Many states have encouraged providers to authorize early medication refills and waive refill limits.
- Will I need to go to a laboratory facility for lab work before my telemedicine visit?  
Regular lab work (blood draws, pregnancy tests, etc.): For patients subject to Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) testing, such as pregnancy and liver function tests, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has advised health care providers to use their best medical judgement during the pandemic. Your health care provider will weigh the risks of whether to waive the tests at this time.
- Should I bring specific information to the telemedicine visit, such as my current weight, blood pressure, pulse (heart beats per minute), oxygen saturation, etc.? If so, how can I collect this information safely and accurately from home?  
If you can obtain these measurements, they will be very helpful for your health care team.

### If you have concerns about telemedicine, ask any questions you have, such as:

- Will our conversation be recorded?
- What information will you collect during our visit?
- How is my health information shared through my call/web visit protected?

### How to prepare for your visit:

- Call your insurance company and ask if payment coverage authorization will be needed before a telemedicine appointment.
- Have your list of medications and insurance card with you.
- Make a list of your questions and/or concerns about symptoms, or side effects from therapy you may be experiencing to refer to during your visit, so you won't forget them.
- Consider asking a family member to attend the visit with you so there is another person listening, and ask if they can take some notes so you can focus on what your health care provider is saying.
- Have a pen and paper with you to take any notes.

