

Is Online Health Care Right for Me?

Understanding the Value of Telehealth During COVID-19 and Beyond



It's Friday evening and a skin rash you developed earlier in the day is spreading. You consider waiting until Monday to call and set up an appointment with your health care provider. You prefer not to delay care so you turn to telehealth and decide to see a provider online.

When Should I Use Telehealth?

It's a good option for things like routine care, prescriptions (including refills), mental or behavioral health support, and treatment for medical conditions like allergies, arthritis, and asthma.^{2, 3, 4} If you are experiencing a mild illness or injury, consider scheduling a video visit with a health care provider (using services similar to Apple FaceTime or Facebook Messenger video chat). Video visits are also a good option for follow-up care.⁵ For certain medical conditions, you may need to see a provider in-person (e.g., cancer treatments, immunizations, dialysis services, etc.).



Overview

Telehealth is a safe and convenient alternative to receive services for a wide range of health conditions. It's care delivered through telecommunications technologies, such as smartphone applications, email, telephone, text, video, or the web.

Among the many benefits of telehealth is your ability to see a provider from wherever you are, like the comfort of your home. Everyone benefits – the elderly, rural populations, and parents with children. Those at higher risk of serious illness, including older adults and those with underlying health conditions (e.g., chronic illnesses and autoimmune disorders) benefit by limiting their potential exposure to common germs like the flu.¹

What technology do I need?

If you have a smartphone, tablet, or computer with an internet connection, you'll be able to talk to your provider live, using audio and video; or you can send and receive messages using secure chat, email, and text messaging (providers may respond at a later time).

¹ Johns Hopkins Medicine, Benefits of Telemedicine. Available at: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/treatment-tests-and-therapies/benefits-of-telemedicine>

² MobiHealthNews, Telehealth gets the nod for follow-up care, September 2015. Available at: www.mobihealthnews.com/news/telehealth-gets-nod-follow-care.

³ U.S. News, A Beginner's Guide to a Virtual Doctor's Visit, April 2020. Available at: health.usnews.com/conditions/articles/a-beginners-guide-to-a-virtual-doctors-visit.

⁴ Medical News Today, Teletherapy: How it works. Available at: www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/teletherapy#disadvantages.

⁵ Mobihealth News, Telehealth in the time of COVID-19, March 2020. Available at: www.mobihealthnews.com/news/europe/telehealth-time-covid-19.

Getting Started with Telehealth

Talk to your provider about telehealth⁶; questions to ask include:

- Is telehealth offered?
- Is telehealth a good choice for my health condition?
- How do I schedule a video visit?



Your health insurance company can also help connect you to a provider. Many insurance companies offer their own telehealth program⁷ in addition to a health advice line (where you can call to speak with a nurse).

Online telehealth companies are another option allowing you to receive care on-demand, 24/7, particularly if your provider does not offer telehealth or if you are seeking care afterhours. More information about online telehealth companies can be found here: mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/hit/hit/documents/HIT_Online_Telehealth_Company_Flyer.pdf.

Additional Resources

- MHCC, *Frequently Asked Questions by Consumers about Virtual Visits* mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/hit/hit/documents/HIT_Consumer_VV_FAQ.pdf
- Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society, *A Patient's Guide to Telemedicine: What to Do When Your Doctor Calls or Video-Chats with You* www.himss.org/news/patients-guide-telemedicine
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services telehealth.hhs.gov/patients/



Remember, if you are experiencing serious or potentially life-threatening symptoms, **call 911** for emergency medical assistance or go to the nearest emergency room.

Questions? Contact us at mhcc.telehealth@maryland.gov.

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Understanding Telehealth. Available at: telehealth.hhs.gov/patients/understanding-telehealth/.

⁷ Insurance plans may cover telehealth if it is provided directly by a health care provider or hospital, or through a telehealth service; consumers might have a copay or other out-of-pocket charge. Medicare will cover telehealth services and Medicare Advantage plans may waive or reduce cost sharing. More information is available at: www.wsj.com/articles/what-you-need-to-know-about-telehealth-during-the-coronavirus-crisis-11584874801.