
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health Services

B.C. MODERNIZES REGULATIONS FOR SALE OF EYEWEAR

VICTORIA – The Province introduced a series of changes today that will modernize the way in which British Columbians get their glasses and contact lenses, and give them more choice, announced Health Services Minister Kevin Falcon.

“After lengthy consultation on some of these issues, and a recent court decision that caused us to take a broader look at all the existing regulations, now is the time to take action,” said Falcon. “With advances in technology and more consumers turning to the Internet, it makes sense to modernize a decades-old system to give British Columbians more choice while maintaining public safety.”

The Province is giving six weeks’ notice that effective May 1, 2010, changes will be made to the regulations for opticians and optometrists under the Health Professions Act, including:

- Removal of most of the restrictions that allow only opticians or optometrists, or workers supervised by them, to dispense glasses or contacts.
- Allowing prescriptions issued by medical doctors and optometrists outside of the province to be filled within B.C.
- Allowing people to order glasses or contacts online without having to give the seller a copy of their prescription, sight-test assessment or contact-lens specifications.
- Requiring opticians and optometrists in B.C. to include in a prescription or sight-test assessment the measurement of distance between the client’s pupils, which is required for the proper fitting of glasses.
- Requiring opticians and optometrists in B.C. to give clients, free of charge, a copy of their prescription, sight-test assessment or contact-lens specifications – whether or not it is requested by the client – and also to give a copy, free of charge, to a third-party eyewear seller or other person if requested by the client.

The initial fitting of contacts to determine the lens specifications will still be done only by an optician, optometrist or medical doctor, or workers supervised by them, using information contained in a prescription or sight-test assessment.

Also taking effect on May 1 is a change to optician sight-testing. Opticians will now be able to independently conduct sight-tests for healthy clients aged 19-65. This eliminates the extra step of having a sight-test reviewed by a medical doctor who then issues a prescription. Instead, a screening process will be put in place to ensure a client is healthy enough to be eligible for the sight-test, and is fully informed about the difference between a sight-test and an eye-health examination.

The screening process will also require the optician to refer a client to a medical doctor or optometrist if the client has a specified pre-existing condition or if certain test results occur. Regular eye-health examinations will still be recommended for all British Columbians, who should consult a medical doctor or optometrist about how often they should have an eye-health examination.

An October 2009 decision by the B.C. Court of Appeal found that Coastal Contacts, a B.C.-based online eyewear seller with approximately 120 employees, is contravening the regulations by dispensing contact refills without seeing a prescription. These regulatory changes will address the court decision.

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