

Bellingham Health Clinic Changes During the COVID-19 Outbreak:

Last updated 3/17/2020

Bellingham Health and Functional Medicine is taking strong measures to protect our patients and staff during the COVID-19 outbreak. Our goal is to continue serving our patients with care and compassion, while implementing special safety protocols for the protection of all.

Changes include the following:

- **Patients MUST notify us of any cold or flu symptoms before coming to the office.** This is required even if you have a previous appointment to be seen for something else.
- We are shifting as many visits as practical to Telemedicine Visits. We will use on-line video and other remote tools to see you without an in-office visit. This will save you the trip and potential viral exposure. (See Telemedicine Visits below)
- Some routine Well Checks, and other non-urgent visits may be delayed until the COVID-19 outbreak is under control. Please contact us to see if your visit can be safely delayed.
- Patients who need an in-person visit with their provider will be seen, but additional screening and safety protocols will be used for everyone's protection.
- With fewer in-person visits, our reception desk may be closed at times during normal working hours. Even if the reception desk is closed, we will still be monitoring phone messages and portal communications. Please call or use the clinic portal to let us know what you need (<https://12814.portal.athenahealth.com/>). If you need to pick up a prescription or see us in person, please call ahead to make sure that the office will be open for you.

We appreciate your patience and cooperation with these changes. We are doing our best to minimize the inconvenience. We want to make it as easy as possible for you to get the care you need during these special circumstances. We look forward to the end of the COVID-19 outbreak. If everyone does their part, we can stop the outbreak sooner. Links to information about COVID-19 and the Coronavirus are at the bottom of this page.

Telemedicine Visits:

Bellingham Health can provide certain types of care through a telemedicine visit. We have been using this on-line option with some of our patients for about a year, and it works very well. The COVID-19 outbreak has encouraged us to expand the use of Telemedicine to all appropriate patients. It offers added convenience for our patients and reduces the COVID-19 exposure risk for all of us.

How Telemedicine Works:

Telemedicine is a safe, easy option for many types of medical concerns. You will see and speak to your provider using secure video conferencing technology on your smartphone or computer.

The first step is scheduling. Our staff may reach out to you to change an existing in-office visit to telemedicine, or you may request a telemedicine visit when you call to schedule an appointment. It is ultimately up to your provider to decide whether telemedicine is appropriate for your situation. Please understand that this decision is made to provide the most complete and appropriate care.

For a telemedicine visit, you will need:

- A smartphone or PC with a forward-facing camera and microphone so we can see and talk with you.
- Your phone or PC must be connected to the Internet and be able to receive email from our office.

To start a telemedicine appointment:

- When you make a telemedicine appointment, we will send you an email with instructions and a web link for connecting to the video call at your appointment time. When you click the link it will take you to a secure virtual waiting room where you can check in for your appointment. When the provider is ready, they will connect with you and begin your visit.

Cost:

Telemedicine visits are billed just like a normal in-office visit.

- Copay and/or deductible may apply, depending on your specific insurance plan.
- You will receive a bill in the mail that shows the amount you owe after your insurance plan has paid their portion.
- There may be times when a telemedicine visit needs to be converted to an in-office visit. In these instances, there would not be a charge associated with the telemedicine portion of the care.

When to use telemedicine:

Telemedicine is a safe, effective option for a variety of visit types:

- Routine follow-up visits for chronic conditions
- Routine medication review
- Mild cases of cold, cough, sore throat, sinus infections, vomiting, diarrhea, urinary tract infections, etc. (especially if you are otherwise healthy)
- Mild cases of back pain, sprain, strain, or bruising
- Travel consults, medical goal setting, or advanced care planning
- Mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety

Visits that are not appropriate for telemedicine:

The following types of visits typically require a physical exam, which must be done in person. Your provider will always be the one to determine if your specific medical concern is appropriate for telemedicine.

- Wellness exams
- Comprehensive health assessments
- Complex or severe injuries
- Severe infections
- Other complex or severe medical issues that require an in-person evaluation

COVID-19 / Coronavirus Information:

We recommend the following resources for current, trustworthy information about COVID-19:

- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- Whatcom County Health Department: www.whatcomcounty.us/3329/Novel-Coronavirus-COVID-19
- Skagit County Health Department: www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/HealthDiseases/coronavirus.htm
- Washington State Health Department: www.doh.wa.gov/emergencies/coronavirus
- World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

For more information about handwashing and other steps you can take to reduce the spread of disease:

- Washington State Department of Health: www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/BePreparedBeSafe/Diseases/GermsPreventTheirSpread
- CDC: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention-treatment.html
- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/get-your-household-ready-for-COVID-19.html>