

Guidelines support telemedicine as an effective tool for allergists

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Credit: American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology

Since its beginning more than 40 years ago when 500 patient consultations were conducted by interactive television, demand for telemedicine has continued to increase. Patients like the convenience and physicians know it can offer needed care to those who might not otherwise have access.

A new position paper in *Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology*, the scientific publication of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI), recognizes that allergy is one of the top conditions patients seek care for using telemedicine. ACAAI supports

the use of telemedicine for allergy patients and hopes the new guidelines encourage more allergists to use the technology in their practices.

"Telemedicine services are designed to provide high-quality care, including making every effort to collect accurate and complete clinical information during a visit," says allergist Tania Elliott, MD, lead author of the paper and member of the ACAAI Public Relations Committee. "Having mechanisms to facilitate continuity of care, follow-up care, and care coordination is vital. Allergists need to know the policies, regulations, and clinical guidelines in offering these services to their patients. These are the reasons these guidelines have been developed."

Telemedicine can expand access to care. According to a 2015 study, the mean no-show rate for physician appointments was upwards of 20 percent, with a mean cost per patient of approximately \$200. Telemedicine technologies can connect patients with the clinician without having to incur long travel times and associated expenses, particularly if they do not have ready access or are unwilling to travel. According to the American Telemedicine Association, more than 15 million Americans received some form of medical care remotely in 2015, with a projected increase to 158.4 million by 2020.

"In addition to expanding access to care, telemedicine can decrease [health care costs](#)," says [allergist](#) Jay Portnoy, MD, ACAAI Past President and co-author of the position paper. "A 2014 study found that an estimated 100 million e-visits across the world would result in as much as \$5 billion in savings for the health care system. But vital to expanding telemedicine care in the US is a streamlined process for multistate licensure. That would improve access to specialty care while allowing states to retain individual licensing and regulatory authority."

Telemedicine use for allergy care is likely to expand with broader telehealth applications in medicine, although further research into effect

and outcomes is needed. Many allergists now do initial visits by telemedicine to help determine if in-office testing is required. For certain types of follow-up visits, such as a check up on how a medication or allergen immunotherapy is doing, telemedicine can save time and money.

The optimistic conclusion of the position paper states, "The ACAAI will monitor this rapidly changing landscape to ensure provision of high-quality care to the patient with allergic and immunologic disorders and consistency of practice in an era of futuristic technologies. Despite the challenges, the current and future benefits of [telemedicine](#) are promising and exciting for allergists, [patients](#), and [health care](#) systems."

Provided by American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology

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