



Standard of Practice: Physical Examinations (2021)

A **Standard of Practice** is the minimum standard of professional behavior and ethical conduct expected by the College on a specific issue.

Physical Examinations

Preamble

Physicians must conduct physical examinations in a professional and respectful manner which promotes patient comfort and ensures that the patient has an understanding of the scope of the examination.

Definitions

Chaperone: an appropriately-trained individual who works with a physician to observe examinations, procedures, and/or clinical encounters (for more information see College policy on “Chaperones”).

Sensitive examination: a clinical examination of either the pelvic, genital, breast or rectal area of a patient’s body.

Standard of Practice

Physicians must conduct physical examinations in a professional and respectful manner. Except in emergency situations, physicians must always obtain informed consent from the patient, or their substitute decision maker, before proceeding with an examination (for more information see College policy on “Consent to Treatment”).

Prior to conducting a physical examination, physicians **must:**

- Highlight the scope of the intended examination.
- Answer any questions the patient may have about the examination.

- If the examination includes a sensitive examination, inquire whether the patient wishes to have a chaperone present (see College policy on “Chaperones”).
- Provide privacy for the patient to undress when disrobing is required.
- Provide the patient with a gown or cloth to drape during the examination, if disrobed.

During a physical examination, physicians **must**:

- Stop the examination upon the patient’s request.
- Explain any changes to the scope of the examination and seek consent prior to proceeding.
- Not assist the patient with the adjustment or removal of clothing unless the patient consents.

Prior to, during and following a physician examination, physicians **must**:

- Not make remarks or gestures which could reasonably be interpreted as demeaning or sexualized by the patient.
- Explain why any questions relating to sexual matters are being asked so the intention is not misconstrued.

Acknowledgements

CPSBC (2019). Physical Examinations and Procedures (Practice Standard)

Document History

Approved by Council	March 13, 2021
Reviewed & Updated	
Expected Review Date	March 13, 2026
Publication Date	March 17, 2021