

Telehealth Physical Exam Tips for CCHS Providers

General tips:

- On video, you can easily assess things like eyes, oropharynx, range of motion, gait, and skin. Phone visits are more limiting but it is still possible to collect some vital signs and assess things like respiratory distress, speech, and orientation.
- **Photos.** For better visualization than video, ask the patient to take a picture with their phone and use the “share screen” feature in Zoom or better yet, send the photo in a MyChart message. Photos will immediately appear in the Media tab in the patient’s chart. Photos can be especially helpful for rashes, conjunctivitis, and pharyngitis.
- **Family members.** You can ask the patient or a family member to press on lymph nodes, abdomen, or other areas that may be tender. Make sure the patient is comfortable having another person being involved in their exam.
- **Camera operator.** A family member or roommate can also hold the patient’s device (phone, tablet, computer) to get a better view of a body part e.g. when observing gait or range of motion.
- Below are specific examples of what you can assess by video.

Vitals

- Patients can check some of their own vitals if they have a thermometer, BP cuff, scale, etc.
- For heart rate, you can teach the patient how to palpate their pulse. They can count it out, “1,2,3...” while you set a stopwatch on your phone for 15 seconds and then multiply by four. You may do the same thing to obtain respiratory rate (e.g. a child with asthma).
- Select patients may have a home pulse oximeter.

HEENT

- Head: swelling, lesions, tenderness of sinuses
- Ears: external appearance, tenderness, drainage
- Eyes: EOM, pupil reactivity (patient or family member can use a flashlight), eyelid swelling, conjunctivitis
- Nose: swelling, tenderness
- Throat: erythema, exudate, uvula, lesions
- External lymph node tenderness

Skin

- Of course, you can do a visual exam but the patient can also help you check for measurements, blanching, tenderness, raised v. flat lesions, and induration.
- Ask to the patient to take photos (see General tips above).

Cardiopulmonary

- Respiratory distress, speaking in complete sentences, pulse, BP, signs of cyanosis, LE edema, capillary refill, skin tone

Abdomen

- Having a family member or roommate can be especially helpful to assess for tenderness if the patient and assistant are comfortable doing this. The patient can lie down and point the camera at their own belly while the assistant pushes on the four quadrants.
- Check for tenderness of abdomen, CVAT, guarding/rebound.

Breast / GU

- We do not recommend performing breast or GU exams by video.

MSK

- Appearance: swelling, edema, bruising, lacerations
- Movement: range of motion, gait
- Tenderness: instruct the patient on checking for point tenderness
- With your guidance, patients can complete Ottawa ankle rules & knee rules.

Neuro

- Cranial nerves, speech, orientation.
- A family member can assist with testing muscle strength, sensation, finger-nose-finger, pronator drift, Romberg.
- If something is abnormal, it can be helpful to ask a family member about the patient's baseline.

References

- Thomas Jefferson University "Telemedicine: Conducting an Effective Physical Exam" course. Available at: cme.jefferson.edu
- www.telemedmag.com