

**British Columbia**

## **B.C. changes eyewear regulations**

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The B.C. government is deregulating the prescription eyewear industry — a move that optometrists say could put people's eyesight at risk.

Starting May 1, people in B.C will be able to get prescription glasses and contact lenses without comprehensive eye exams or an optometrist's prescription.

The government says there is no medical evidence to suggest the changes could impact people's health and says the new regulations will modernize eyewear sales.

"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," Health Minister Kevin Falcon said in a new release.

But the B.C. Association of Optometrists says the changes could lead to an increase in blindness from glaucoma.

"These changes are far reaching and very unique in North America, and to propose these changes and implement them in six weeks, BCAO believes, is irresponsible," said the association's president Dr. Antoinette Dumalo

Without regular exams, the early signs of glaucoma could go undetected in many people, said Dumalo.

"A comprehensive eye health exam does more than generate a prescription. It also plays a role in terms of detecting serious eye disease in the early stages," she said.

According to the Ministry of Health, the other changes in the deregulation include:

- 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.
- Opticians will be able to independently conduct sight-tests for healthy clients aged 19 to 65 years old without a medical doctor's prescription.