

# Teleconsultations during a pandemic

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Stay informed of the latest information on the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), available on the [PAHO](#) and [WHO](#) websites and through your national and local public health authorities.

## Teleconsultations: an essential tool for use during a pandemic

In situations where a pandemic is declared, the feelings of anxiety and uncertainty can overwhelm people, and health systems can struggle to cope with an uncontrolled and exponential demand. Without appropriate planning and mitigation measures, health services can be exposed to the risk of collapse caused by an inundation of queries that could be serviced by virtual means. Health facilities may become overwhelmed and have insufficient capacity to provide adequate treatment to those most in need of care. Teleconsultations are a safe and effective way to assess suspected cases and guide the patient's diagnosis and treatment, minimizing the risk of disease transmission. These teleconsultations enable many of the key clinical services to continue to operate regularly and uninterrupted, both in preparation for and in the course of a public health emergency.

### What is telepresence?

Telepresence allows a patient to feel as if she or he were present without being physically in the same location as medical staff. Patients and medical personnel interact virtually via technology.

### What is teleconsultation?

Teleconsultation, sometimes referred to as remote consultation or telehealth, refers to interactions that happen between a clinician and a patient for the purpose of providing diagnostic or therapeutic advice through electronic means.

### What do I need to know to host a teleconsultation?

Hosting a teleconsultation requires basic knowledge in the use of technologies, understanding the limitations inherent to teleconsultation, and knowing when a face-to-face consultation is preferable. It is necessary to know how and where (what institutions are offering teleconsultations) to connect, and with which hardware and software, since there are several types. However, the functionalities are the same and are generally very intuitive.

### What are the minimum technology requirements for running a teleconsultation?

In general terms, for a teleconsultation, it is necessary to have an internet connection, a suitable computer with audio and video capabilities, and transmission devices. Fast and stable internet and broadband connections (ADSL, fiber optic, cable, 4G or similar; at least 1MB / 300kb) are recommended. It is also necessary to understand specific software (e.g. web-based

conference tools, such as *Webex, Skype, Zoom, Elluminate, MS Teams, and FaceTime*, among others) that allows telepresence and to have an internet provider that offers a service with the minimum-quality required. Having a phone, in case the video conference communication is interrupted, is highly recommended. Finally, it is important not to have other applications open that interfere with the speed of the internet connection or communication.

### **When could I do teleconsultations?**

Teleconsultations are a useful approach for triaging patients and reducing unnecessary visits to emergency departments. Scheduled teleconsultations allow the evaluation, monitoring, and follow-up of outpatients who do not require face-to-face assessment. However, according to the technological infrastructure available, there might still be services that cannot be replaced by telepresence, so it is important to determine when telepresence is an option and when is not.

### **What are some of the possible services via teleconsultation?**

Teleconsultations bring multiple possibilities in the case of pandemic, where authorities may request or impose community isolation, closing of borders, limitation on the means of transportation, and so on. Telepresence in healthcare can be used to provide telecare, offer remote assistance, and help with administrative management of patients, triage, follow-up, meetings, and technical discussions among physicians in different locations, among others.

### **Where can I find technical information about telemedicine?**

- [PAHO/WHO eHealth Conversations](#) (Pag. 99 – Telemedicine, Management, and Evolution of Networks)
- [PAHO/WHO Framework for the Implementation of a Telemedicine](#)
- [PAHO/WHO Defining evaluation indicators for telemedicine](#)
- [WHO Guidelines on Digital Health Interventions](#)
- [Virtually Perfect? Telemedicine for Covid-19](#). by Judd E. Hollander, M.D., and Brendan G. Carr, M.D.
- [Value of Telemonitoring and Telemedicine in Heart Failure Management](#)
- [Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare](#)

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### **Acknowledgement**

This factsheet was prepared in collaboration with the [Inter-American Development Bank \(IDB\) Social Protection and Digital Health Focal Points](#), [Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires, Department of Medical Informatics \(PAHO/WHO Collaborating center for Information Systems and Digital Health\)](#), [Universitat Oberta de Catalunya \(PAHO/WHO Collaborating center for Telemedicine\)](#), [Center for Health Informatics, University of Illinois USA](#), (PAHO/WHO Collaborating center for Information Systems and Digital Health), [WHO-EURO Digital Health Unit](#), [Central American Health Informatics Network](#) (RECAINSA), and PAHO's Information Systems for Health ([IS4H](#)) Network of Experts.

