



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

*PO Box 47890 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7890
Tel: (360) 236-4030 • 711 Washington Relay Service*

NOTICE OF ADOPTION OF A POLICY STATEMENT

Title of Policy Statement: Continuing Education Requirements During the COVID-19 Response. Policy Number: OB 20-01

Issuing Entity: Board of Optometry

Subject Matter: Addressing the impact COVID-19 response measures are having on licensed optometrists with regard to meeting continuing education requirements.

Effective Date: May 18, 2020

Contact Person: Lorelei Walker
PO Box 47852
Olympia, WA 98504-7852
360-236-4947
Lorelei.Walker@doh.wa.gov

OFFICE OF THE CODE REVISER
STATE OF WASHINGTON
FILED

DATE: May 20, 2020

TIME: 7:52 AM

WSR 20-11-068

*Department of Health
Office of Health Systems Quality Assurance
Board of Optometry*

Policy Statement

Revised – 10/18/11

<i>Title:</i>	Continuing Education Requirements During the COVID-19 Response	<i>Number: OB 20-01</i>
<i>References:</i>	Chapter 18.54 RCW; RCW 43.70.280 ; WAC 246-12-210 , 246-851-090 , 246-851-125 , 246-851-170 , and; Proclamations 20-05 , 20-14 , 20-24 , 20-25 , and 20-32 ;	
<i>Contact:</i>	Loralei Walker, Program Manager	
<i>Phone:</i>	360-236-4947	
<i>Email:</i>	Loralei.Walker@doh.wa.gov	
<i>Effective Date:</i>	May 18, 2020	
<i>Supersedes:</i>	N/A	
<i>Approved By:</i>	William Prothero, OD, Chair of the Washington State Board of Optometry	

To address the difficulties related to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that impact licensed optometrists with regard to meeting continuing education (CE) requirements in Washington State, and in accordance with WAC [246-12-210](#) the Board of Optometry (board) will not take enforcement action against licensed optometrists in the following circumstances during the state declared emergency:

1. Unrestricted use of live courses attended remotely under [WAC 246-851-125\(2\)](#). Licensees may accrue up to 50 hours of CE through this method.
2. Unrestricted use of self-directed study under [WAC 246-851-170\(1\)](#). Licensees may accrue up to 50 credit hours through this method.

Further, in the case of a CE audit or complaint investigation once the state declared COVID-19 public health emergency has ended, the board will consider the individual and unique circumstances, and the realistic availability or non-availability of possible alternative courses of action.

[Chapter 246-12 WAC](#) regulates healthcare practitioners credentialed under the Uniform Disciplinary Act; optometrists are health care practitioners subject to the Act. [WAC 246-12-210](#) states: “A practitioner may be excused from or granted an extension of continuing education requirements due to illness or other extenuating circumstances. The profession’s regulatory entity determines when the

requirements may be waived or may grant an extension.” The board is the regulatory entity with authority to make determinations about continuing education requirements for optometrists.

[WAC 246-851-090](#) requires licensed optometrists (licensees) to complete and document 50 hours of CE every two years.

As the spread of COVID-19 continued and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance encouraged the restriction of large gatherings, organizations and entities began to cancel large professional development events and conferences that included continuing education opportunities. As a result, optometrists are without the ability to use in-person education to meet their CE obligations for renewal of their licenses.

Washington State’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic is summarized as follows:

- On February 29, 2020, the Governor issued [Proclamation 20-05](#) declaring a State of Emergency for all counties in the state of Washington.
- On March 15, 2020, the CDC issued guidance discouraging all gatherings of 50 or more. On March 16, 2020, the Governor issued [Proclamation 20-14](#) prohibiting gatherings of 50 or more in all counties in the state of Washington.
- On March 19, 2020, the Governor issued [Proclamation 20-24](#) prohibiting non-urgent medical procedures to reduce disruption and maintain the supply chain of personal protective equipment (PPE) during this outbreak.
- On March 23, 2020, the Governor issued [Proclamation 20-25 Stay Home—Stay Healthy](#) that requires people to cease leaving their homes except to conduct essential activities or for employment of essential services.

To address the difficulties related to the COVID-19 pandemic that impact licensed optometrists with regard to meeting CE requirements in Washington State, and in accordance with WAC [246-12-210](#), the board will not take enforcement action against licensed optometrists in the following circumstances during the state declared emergency:

1. Unrestricted use of live courses attended remotely under [WAC 246-851-125\(2\)](#). Licensees may accrue up to 50 hours of CE through this method.
2. Unrestricted use of self-directed study under [WAC 246-851-170\(1\)](#). Licensees may accrue up to 50 credit hours through this method.

Further, in the case of a CE audit or complaint investigation once the state declared COVID-19 public health emergency has ended, the board will consider the individual and unique circumstances, and the realistic availability or non-availability of possible alternative courses of action.