



The Nova Scotia College of Nursing (NSCN) is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs), registered psychiatric nurses (RPNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) in Nova Scotia. Our mandate is to protect the public by promoting the provision of safe, competent, ethical and compassionate nursing services by our registrants. The term nurse in this document refers to LPNs, RNs, RPNs and NPs unless otherwise stated.

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Our practice support tools are developed using current reference material. The source of this material is available upon request.



This tool is a resource for nurses who are currently providing foot care or are considering providing foot care to clients to help them understand:

- Entry and post entry-level competencies in foot care
- Nursing scope of practice when providing foot care
- Recommending and administering over the counter (OTC) medications and devices
- Opening a foot care practice
- Liability coverage

Like all regulatory tools, use this document in conjunction with employer policy, applicable legislation, and the standards of practice and code of ethics for nurses.

Nurses are expected to provide safe and competent foot care. To do this, you must:

- Obtain the appropriate advanced foot care education
- Follow organizational policies specific to foot care or develop and follow clear foot care policies if you are self-employed
- Ensure your practice is consistent with best practices in foot care, including care of equipment.

Is foot care an entry-level competency for nurses?

Basic foot care competencies are part of the scope of practice of all nurses. The foundational knowledge related to basic nursing foot care is part of entry-level nursing education and is an entry-level competency for all nurses.

Advanced foot care competencies are post entry-level competencies and require additional education. Clients who have multiple co-morbidities have increased risk of complications associated with foot care therefore require advanced nursing foot care, even if they are not experiencing any lower leg or foot issues. Employers may define the parameters of the education required to meet the needs of clients within the practice context.

If the client's lower leg and foot are impacted by disease, the nurse should possess the necessary advanced foot care knowledge to anticipate, manage and prevent any further complications that may be associated with foot care. Employers may define the parameters of the education required to meet the needs of clients within the practice context.

Additional education for post entry-level competencies can be provided by the employer, educational institutions, or private trainers.

What is the scope of practice when providing foot care to clients?

Nurses with advanced foot care education are expected to practice within their scope of practice and in accordance with their standards of practice and best practices in advanced foot care. Employers may define the parameters of the education required to meet the needs of clients within the practice context. Additional education for post entry-level competencies can be provided by the employer, educational institutions, or private trainers.

Nurses should follow organizational [policy](#) as it relates to the scope of practice in foot care. Nurses who are self-employed are accountable to develop policies related to their foot care practice.

NSCN does not recommend or endorse education beyond entry-level programs and does not authorize the use of titles, signatures or abbreviations that convey or imply a nurse has attained a specialized credential.

NSCN does not maintain a specialized practice register or grant a specialized designation to those who have completed additional education in foot care.

LPN Practice

- Based on the comprehensive assessment of the client, LPNs with the required advanced foot care competencies may independently or collaboratively develop the foot care portion of the overall [plan of care](#). LPN practice is independent and autonomous when the client's foot care needs are well defined as outlined in the foot care plan of care and the client's responses to [interventions](#) are predictable and consistent over time.

RN and RPN Practice

- RN and RPN practice is independent and autonomous with all clients regardless of how defined the client's needs are. The development and implementation of the nursing portion of the foot care plan of care is completed independently or in collaboration with the LPN.

All Nurses

- The client's primary care provider must be consulted if the needs of the client exceed any nurse's individual or professional scope of practice. Clients should be referred to a walk-in clinic or Emergency Department if the client does not have an NP or family physician and their need is emergent.

LPNs, RNs and RPNs are not authorized to autonomously perform foot care procedures below the level of the dermis because of the inherent risks in doing so. Any foot care procedure below the dermis requires a medical diagnosis and an order or authorization from a primary care provider.

Can I recommend and administer over the counter medications and devices to clients as part of my foot care practice?

Clients receiving foot care may need OTC medications or devices to aid in their care.

LPN Practice

- LPNs with the required advanced foot care competencies may recommend OTC medications only in the limited and specific context of advanced foot care practice.
- Clients seeking recommendation for OTC medications or devices to manage issues other than those related to the lower leg and foot need to be referred to an appropriate healthcare provider or health care service.

RN and RPN Practice

- RNs and RPNs with the required competencies may recommend OTC medications in a wide variety of contexts; their practice is not limited to foot care only.

All Nurses

- Must ensure the OTC medications or devices they are recommending are treating an already diagnosed condition and not new symptoms which would require further assessment by an NP or physician.
- Must follow organizational policies and processes. Your organization may not authorize you to administer OTC medication, so you should always check to make sure there is policy to support your practice.
- If you are self-employed, you are accountable to develop your own organizational policy that supports your practice.
- If your nursing assessment indicates that the client may require a prescription medication or foot care device, you are required to collaborate with the most appropriate prescriber, such as an NP or physician.

FOOT CARE IN SELF EMPLOYED PRACTICE

Can I be self-employed and open my own foot care practice?

Yes, nurses can open a self-employed practice, including foot care, and provide professional nursing services to clients in a variety of practice settings.

What should I consider prior to opening my own foot care practice?

Prior to initiating your foot care practice, there are a number of considerations that you must factor, including but not limited to:

- [informed consent](#)
- policy and procedures
- managing client records
- [conflict of interest](#)
- advertising and endorsing products
- liability coverage and;
- designations and credentials.

For more information, please review the [Self-Employment Practice Guideline](#).

Do I require additional insurance for my own foot care practice?

Yes, you will require additional insurance for your foot care practice. Nurses in a self-employed practice should consult with their respective liability provider to discuss additional liability protection:

- [Lloyd Sudd Insurance Brokers Ltd](#) for LPNs
- [Canadian Nurses Protective Society](#) for RNs and RPNs

Key Points

- Basic foot care is an entry-level competency and is part of entry-level education.
- Advanced foot care is a post entry-level competency that requires additional education.
- Nurses with advanced foot care education are expected to practice within their scope of practice and in accordance with their standards of practice and best practices in advanced foot care.
- Nurses work in [collaboration](#) with other health care providers to ensure client needs are met when their needs exceed the nurse's scope of practice.
- Nurses must adhere to the OTC guidelines in order to recommend OTC medications or devices.
- Nurses can be self-employed and open a foot care practice.
- Self-employed foot care nurses are required to secure additional liability insurance.

Suggested Reading

- [Nurses Recommending and Administering Over the Counter Medications or Devices](#)
- [Medication Guidelines for Nurses](#)
- [Documentation Guidelines for Nurses](#)
- [Self-Employed Practice Guideline for Nurses](#)

For further information on anything contained within this practice guideline, please contact a NSCN practice consultant at practice@nscn.ca.