

Why telehealth? Matthew Winkleman, MD, a family medicine physician with Southern Illinois Healthcare, has a few good reasons:

- Managing patients' chronic conditions
- Providing mental health follow-up care
- Evaluating rashes and other minor conditions

"There are a lot of areas where this can be useful," said Dr. Winkleman, pictured right, who typically cares for patients in his Harrisburg office.

Most of all, telehealth reduces the risk of exposure to COVID-19, especially for patients with chronic conditions who are more vulnerable to serious illness from the virus. COVID-19 has led many providers to offer virtual visits, thanks to modified State regulations in response to the public health crisis.

Southern Illinois Healthcare began conducting virtual visits for established primary care patients through SIH Medical Group. It's up to the physician to decide which patients can be best served through video.

There are some limitations, though. Many residents in southern Illinois have spotty internet service and some patients require office visits because of their symptoms or health condition. Even so, Winkleman is pleased with the progress he's making with patients—and that he's able to learn more about them. For example, during a recent virtual visit he saw one patient painting.

"I think a lot of people appreciate we're being mindful of their health and safety," he said. "It's one more piece of trying to keep patients and staff as safe as possible."

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