

Dear Colleague

**GENERAL OPHTHALMIC SERVICES (GOS) –  
COVID-19: Face-to-face contact arrangements, including  
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements,  
Emergency Eyecare Treatment Centres (EETCs) and PPE  
supply for EETCs; Emergency/essential domiciliary eye  
care arrangements; Key worker status; Financial support for  
some self-employed individuals**

**Summary**

1. This communication provides details of new arrangements for all face-to-face contact between patients and community eye care practitioners, including PPE requirements, the establishment of designated EETCs and PPE supply for EETCs. It also sets out new arrangements for emergency and essential domiciliary eye care provision, clarifies COVID-19 key worker status for the community optical sector and financial support for some self-employed individuals.

**Action**

2. NHS Boards are asked to **urgently** issue this letter and the enclosed Memorandum to all optometrists, ophthalmic medical practitioners and practices within their Board area.

Yours sincerely,



**Heather Campbell**

Interim Deputy Director of Primary Care, Scottish Government

2 April 2020

**Addresses:**

For action  
Chief Executives, NHS Boards

For information  
Chief Executive,  
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**MEMORANDUM TO NHS:  
PCA(O)2020(6)**

**Summary**

1. This Memorandum provides a further important update to all community optometry practices and staff regarding the provision of community eye care services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. It includes:
  - new arrangements for all face-to-face contact between patients and community eye care practitioners, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements, the establishment of designated Emergency Eyecare Treatment Centres (EETCs) and PPE ordering for EETCs;
  - information about emergency and essential domiciliary eye care provision;
  - key worker status for the community optical sector;
  - financial support for some self-employed individuals (e.g. locum optometrists).

**Arrangements for face-to-face contact for community eye care services**

*PPE requirements for all face-to-face contact between patients and practitioners*

3. The Scottish Government has taken into account recent COVID-19 guidance published by the [College of Optometrists](#) on PPE and has determined that, with immediate effect, **all face-to-face contact between patients and community eye care practitioners (which should only be taking place in an emergency) must only be undertaken where the practitioner has appropriate PPE.**
4. At the time of this Memorandum being issued, appropriate PPE comprises of the following:
  - a Fluid Resistant Surgical Facemask;
  - a plastic breath shield attached to the slit lamp, which must be disinfected in between patients. Practitioners are advised to avoid speaking whilst at the slit lamp.

*Establishment of designated EETCs within NHS Boards*

5. The Scottish Government has also determined that, in order to further reduce the risk to patients and staff from COVID-19, there is a need to consolidate and reduce the number of optometry practices providing face-to-face eye care appointments.
6. All NHS Boards must establish, as soon as practicable, designated EETCs within their Board for the provision of face-to-face emergency eye services. An EETC can be a community optometry practice or situated within a hospital setting.

7. Once EETCs have been established within a particular Board, this must be communicated to all community optometry practices situated within the Board along with details of the EETC opening hours. As these details may change over time, each NHS Board must ensure that all community optometry practices and practitioners in the Board area have access to an up-to-date list of designated EETCs and opening hours.
8. **Community optometry practices which are not EETCs must thereafter have no face-to-face contact with patients beyond that required for emergency dispensing purposes.** As set out in [PCA\(O\)2020\(5\)](#), emergency dispensing should only take place in instances where delaying the provision of spectacles would be detrimental to a patient's sight or wellbeing, or where key workers have lost or broken their spectacles. In deciding whether to undertake emergency dispensing, a practice should discuss with the patient all alternative options that may be possible e.g. temporary repairs.
9. In providing financial support to community optometry practices, the Scottish Government expects that these practices will continue to provide a telephone triage or consultation service for emergency or essential eye care after EETCs have been established. This principle applies unless **alternative arrangements have been implemented by a NHS Board.**
10. The difference between telephone triage (for which a claim cannot be submitted) and telephone consultation (for which a claim can be submitted) is as follows:
  - **Telephone triage:** A patient phones the practice with concerns about their vision or eye health and a practice staff member (usually an optical assistant, dispensing optician or optometrist) asks a series of questions to explore the concerns more fully and makes a decision whether the patient requires a telephone consultation with an optometrist.
  - **Telephone consultation:** A telephone consultation is undertaken by an optometrist and will involve all the elements of a normal eye examination, except tests and procedures which require the physical presence of the patient. The patient's history and presenting signs and symptoms will be recorded, and a diagnosis and subsequent management or treatment plan will be made. Any advice and recommendations should be issued and clearly documented in the patient's record.
11. Arrangements for making appointments at EETCs for patients will be issued by your Health Board. Practices that are closed must ensure that any forms of signposting include, but are not limited to, displaying up-to-date contact information, and that answer phones correctly inform patients of where to access advice and care.

### PPE supply for EETCs

12. The Scottish Government has worked with NHS National Services Scotland to establish a central process for EETCs to be provided with PPE and relevant cleaning/decontamination products, and for the collection and disposal of waste from EETCs. Further information will be available in due course.
13. Although current guidance on PPE does not currently recommend the use of a gown/apron, gloves and visor for every face-to-face patient contact, EETCs will be provided with these in addition to the Fluid Resistant Surgical Facemask.
14. EETCs will also be provided with a supply of plastic breath shields for slit lamps.
15. PPE supplied through the new central process will include instructions on appropriate use, removal and disposal of equipment. In addition, guidance is already available to practitioners on the use of PPE equipment and infection prevention and control measures, including:
  - [Health Protection Scotland guidance](#) (including a video) on how to put on, remove and dispose of PPE;
  - NHS Education for Scotland guidance on infection prevention and control guidance which is available on [TURAS](#).

### **Emergency and essential domiciliary eye care**

16. [PCA\(O\)2020\(3\)](#) instructed providers of GOS in Scotland to cease the provision of routine domiciliary eyecare services – to include patients in their own homes as well as those in day or residential centres – with immediate effect until further notice. [PCA\(O\)2020\(4\)](#) set out a framework under which emergency or essential eye care could continue to be provided in the community, including in a domiciliary setting.
17. The Scottish Government has determined that, in order to further reduce the risk to these patients (many of whom are in the high-risk group), with immediate effect all GOS providers in Scotland are instructed to **cease the provision of all emergency or essential face-to-face contact with patients in a domiciliary setting**. Telephone consultations will continue to be permitted and supported. If, following a telephone consultation, a practitioner determines that the patient has an emergency eye problem then they should contact the local EETC.

### **Key worker status for optical practice staff**

18. The Scottish Government published guidance on 24 March 2020 setting out what childcare and learning provision is expected to be made available to key workers during closures of school and early learning and childcare settings to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus---school-and-elc-closures-guidance-on-critical-childcare-provision-for-key-workers/>.

19. All optometrists in Scotland are Category 2 key workers. All other optometry practice staff are Category 3 key workers.

### **Financial support for some self-employed individuals**

20. The UK Government announced details on 26 March 2020 of a Self-employment Income Support Scheme for some people who are self-employed or a member of a partnership and have lost income due to COVID-19. Further details of this support, which will be of particular interest to self-employed locum optometrists, can be found online at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-grant-through-the-coronavirus-covid-19-self-employment-income-support-scheme>.

### **Enquiries**

21. Any enquiries arising from this Memorandum should be emailed to: [eyecare@gov.scot](mailto:eyecare@gov.scot).

Primary Care Division,  
Directorate for Community Health and Social Care  
Scottish Government