

GOC/COVID/02

Date of statement: 19 March 2020 (updated 1 May 2020)

General Optical Council (GOC) statement on supply of spectacles and contact lenses during COVID-19 emergency

1. In these extraordinary times, we are fortunate that in all four countries of the United Kingdom we have a group of exceptionally well qualified eye care professionals on whom the general public and fellow healthcare professionals can rely. Uncertain times mean that our registrants may be called upon to work at the limits of their scope of practice and vary their practice for protracted periods of time and in challenging circumstances. While registrants are encouraged to work up to the limits of their competence, refresher training and/or supervision may be needed.
2. In this statement we hope to reassure our registrants that when they act in good conscience, for the public benefit, exercising professional judgement in all of the circumstances that apply, we will support them.
3. Along with all other healthcare regulators, we have signed a [joint regulatory statement](#) which acknowledges that registrants will need to act differently and deliver care in different ways during the COVID-19 emergency in line with Government and public health guidance. We will take account of this in fulfilling our regulatory functions along with the following statement in response to a question regarding whether it is necessary to attend for a sight test or contact lens fitting/check in order to be able to purchase spectacles and/or contact lenses in the current environment.
4. The relevant legal requirements are set out below.

Issuing spectacles

5. There are no legal restrictions on the supply of spectacles by or under the supervision of GOC registered optometrists and dispensing opticians, including for users aged under 16 or registered sight-impaired / severely sight-impaired (section 27 of Opticians Act 1989). If there is no clinical need for a patient to attend an optical practice, optical businesses should be considering posting or delivering spectacles to the patient.
6. If there is a clinical need, then during the COVID-19 emergency period, business registrants, optometrists and dispensing opticians should consider the risk of requiring a patient to attend an optical practice and potentially contracting or spreading coronavirus compared to any clinical risk of supplying spectacles, and use their professional judgement to decide on the best course of action.

Issuing contact lenses

7. In order to supply contact lenses, the patient must have an in-date contact lens specification which has been issued following a contact lens fitting/check. The contact lens fitting itself can only begin if the patient has had a sight test that has been issued with a prescription in the last two years and before any re-examination date specified in the prescription (section 25(1A)(b) of the Opticians Act). There is no requirement for how long a contact lens specification should last, but good practice in the profession suggests up to two years. If the contact lens specification has expired, this would ordinarily result in GOC registrants and/or businesses withholding supply of contact lenses to patients until they have attended the optical practice for a sight test and/or a contact lens fitting/check.
8. If the contact lens specification is current and there is no clinical need to attend an optical practice, optical businesses should be considering posting or delivering contact lenses to the patient.
9. If there is a clinical need, or the specification has expired, then during the COVID-19 emergency period, business registrants, optometrists and contact lens opticians should consider the risk of requiring a patient to attend an optical practice and potentially contracting or spreading coronavirus compared to any clinical risk of supplying contact lenses on an expired specification, and use their professional judgement to decide on the best course of action.

Exercising professional judgement

10. In making this judgement, registrants should take account of:
 - public health advice at the time in question (some individuals may be self-isolating and unable to attend, public transport may not be available, and some domiciliary visits may no longer be possible for instance);
 - patient vulnerability (Government definition available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>);
 - relevant clinical advice;
 - how long it has been since the last sight test or contact lens fitting/check;
 - whether the original expiration of the specification was less than two years;
 - the nature of any specific clinical risks; and
 - how quickly the business could see the patient following the emergency period in order to minimise any risk.

Recording your decisions

11. Registrants should make a note of their decisions, and the reasons for their decisions, including for the duration of any supply of contact lenses and aftercare plans. The note should be made directly in the patient records, or where this is not possible, the patient records should be updated at the earliest available opportunity.

The GOC will keep this statement under review

12. Next routine review due: not later than 31 January 2021¹.

¹ This statement was reviewed on 1 June 2020 and no changes were made other than to the review date in paragraph 12.