

GOC/COVID/03

Date of statement: 23 March 2020 (updated 1 May 2020)

General Optical Council (GOC) statement on contact lens aftercare 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 regarding the provision of contact lens aftercare.
4. The relevant legal requirements, which apply to both registrants and non-registrants, are set out below.

Aftercare requirements

5. Under section 27(3B) of the Opticians Act 1989, the seller of an optical appliance (or zero powered contact lens) must make arrangements for the patient to receive such aftercare as may be reasonable.

Exercising professional judgement

6. Neither the GOC nor legislation limits the way in which aftercare might be provided. A registrant must exercise professional judgement as to what level of aftercare to provide and how to provide it, which could include remote means such as telephone or video-conference. Registrants should take account of:
 - joint regulatory guidance on remote consultation and prescribing:
<https://standards.optical.org/supporting-guidance/remote-consultations-and-prescribing/>;

- 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 contact lens check;
- 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

7. Registrants should make a note of their aftercare plan, including the reasons for their decisions. 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

8. 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 8.