

GOC/COVID/09

Date of statement: 16 April 2020 (updated 1 May 2020 and 28 May 2021)

## **General Optical Council (GOC) statement on verification of contact lens specifications during COVID-19 emergency**

1. This statement will only apply in the **red** phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, as defined by [The College of Optometrists' red-amber-green classification system](#).
2. Registrants should use their professional judgement to decide whether their actions are appropriate in individual circumstances. We expect registrants to balance the risks of providing contact lenses without verifying the specification against the patient not being provided with contact lenses, and be able to justify their actions.
3. 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.
4. In addition, 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.

### **Purpose of statement**

5. The purpose of this statement is to relax enforcement of the legislation around verification of contact lens specifications to ensure that prescription contact lenses can continue to be supplied to patients remotely during the red phase of the COVID-19 emergency period where optical practices may be closed and it may be difficult to verify contact lens specifications.
6. The easements in this statement help to ensure that patients do not run out of contact lenses or re-use lenses where it is inappropriate to do so. This will also ensure that patients are able to obtain contact lenses through businesses operating within UK law (regardless of whether they are registered with the GOC), rather than being forced to resort to online businesses operating outside UK law where the same standards may not apply.

### **Legal requirements**

7. In order to be supplied with contact lenses, the patient must have an in-date contact lens specification which has been issued following a contact lens fitting/check. Where the sale is being made under the general direction (rather than supervision) of a registrant, and an original of the contact lens

specification is not provided, section 27(3)(ii) of the Opticians Act 1989 requires the specification information or a copy of the specification to be verified with the person who provided the original specification.

8. It should be noted that prescription contact lenses can be supplied without verification of a contact lens specification where:
  - the sale is being made by, or under the supervision of, a registered optometrist, registered dispensing optician or registered medical practitioner; or
  - the supplier is in possession of the original contact lens specification.
9. Zero powered contact lenses cannot be supplied under general direction. They can only be supplied by, or under the supervision of, a registered optometrist, registered dispensing optician or registered medical practitioner.

### **Exercising professional judgement during the COVID-19 emergency**

10. During the COVID-19 emergency period, registrants overseeing the supply of contact lenses under general direction should arrange for reasonable attempts to be made to contact the person who provided the original specification in order to verify it (where they do not have the original specification). If these attempts are not successful (e.g. because the practice is closed or the individual is not working), they should use their professional judgement to decide on the best course of action, which may include providing contact lenses without verifying the specification.
11. In making this judgement, registrants should take account of:
  - the ability to contact the person who provided the original contact lens specification in a timely manner;
  - the ability to access the patient's contact lens records in a timely manner e.g. the practice of the person who provided the original specification may be open and able to provide confirmation, even if that individual is not available;
  - public health advice at the time in question e.g. advice about who should stay at home, the vulnerability of the patient, and how much longer the emergency period is likely to last;
  - the urgency of the order balanced against the risks to the patient of supplying without verifying the contact lens specification, particularly the risk of supplying lenses to an inaccurate specification;
  - relevant clinical advice, including advice from the optical professional bodies specific to the COVID-19 emergency period;

- any previous clinical knowledge of or orders from the patient (e.g. if a contact lens specification has previously been verified that is similar to the current one); and
  - the nature of any specific clinical risks, if known.
12. Where a registrant makes a decision to supply contact lenses without verifying the specification they must:
- carefully consider limiting the quantity of contact lenses supplied (in order to prevent the patient stockpiling lenses and encourage access to aftercare within a reasonable timeframe);
  - inform the patient that the specification has not been verified in accordance with legislative requirements; and
  - provide the patient with appropriate aftercare advice.

### **Recording your decisions**

13. Registrants must make a note of their decisions, and the reasons for their decisions, including the duration of any supply of contact lenses and general advice to patients about safe supply, wear and aftercare. 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.