

GOC/COVID/02

Date of statement: 19 March 2020 (updated 1 May 2020 and 28 May 2021)

## **General Optical Council (GOC) statement on supply of spectacles and contact lenses 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 We expect registrants to balance the risks of providing spectacles and contact lenses on an out-of-date prescription/specification, against seeing a patient in person, and be able to justify their actions.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 set out the legal position in respect of the supply of spectacles and contact lenses, and the factors that we expect registrants to take into account when supplying these optical appliances during the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. Registrants may also wish to review GOC/COVID/03: GOC statement on contact lens aftercare during COVID-19 emergency when considering this statement.

### **Issuing spectacles**

7. 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.
8. If there is a clinical need during the red phase of 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**

9. 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 and 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 no more than 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.
10. 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.
11. If there is a clinical need, or the specification has expired, then during the red phase of 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**

12. In making this judgement, registrants should consider:
  - patient vulnerability and public health advice at the time in question (some individuals may be self-isolating/shielding and unable to attend, public transport may not be readily available, and some domiciliary visits may no longer be possible for instance);
  - relevant clinical advice including from optical professional bodies;
  - how long it has been since the last sight test or contact lens fitting/check;
  - the length of the original contact lens specification;
  - limiting the supply of lenses in order to prevent the patient stockpiling lenses and encourage access to aftercare within a reasonable timeframe;
  - 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**

13. 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.