

# Eye health during coronavirus

What to do and what  
to expect



## **We understand that during these unprecedented times with social distancing in place, getting out and about can be quite daunting if you have sight loss – let alone attending a hospital or eye clinic**

However, it's essential to continue to look after your eye health. Whether it's a regular or follow-up appointment, an injection, or emergency advice or treatment, we've put together some advice and guidance to help you.

## **Attend essential and routine eye appointments, unless you are advised otherwise, or are displaying coronavirus symptoms**

You should still attend unless you have been notified by your consultant that your appointment is cancelled or not to attend, or you are displaying coronavirus symptoms.

If you are displaying symptoms, or have been in contact with someone who has, follow the government advice and call 111 or NHS Direct, depending on where you live. Make sure they are aware that you are due for an eye appointment, too.

## **Seek urgent help in an eye emergency**

If you have a sudden change in your vision, disturbance in your vision (such as flashes or floaters), pain, redness, light sensitivity, discharge or double vision, contact your optician or seek urgent help as soon as you can.

These can be symptoms of serious underlying conditions, but these are often treatable if you see an eye health or medical professional quickly.

Call your optician the same day to discuss your symptoms and they will advise you what to do next. This may be a face to face appointment or advice over the phone. You may be sent to a local specialist optician or to the hospital eye department. If you have sudden loss of vision you should call your local hospital emergency line for advice.

## **Contact your hospital eye department or local Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO) if you're unsure, have questions or can't attend**

Staff at hospitals and eye clinics are usually available to provide information and reassurance if you have any queries.

Call them directly ahead of time; if no-one is available to take your call immediately, some may have recorded information available or an answerphone for you to request a call back.

If you can't make your appointment, always let your clinician, or ECLO, know so they can reschedule it and offer the time to other patients.

## Any special requirements? Contact your hospital or eye clinic

If you need to be accompanied to your appointment by a family member or carer or have any other needs, let the hospital or eye clinic know as far ahead as possible.

They may be able to accommodate this in specific instances, for example if you need to be guided or have additional needs, such as dementia, but the process for this is assessed on a case by case basis and varies hospital to hospital.

## Pack your essentials

Pack a bag of everything you need for your appointment ahead of time.

This could include hand sanitiser, a face covering, a list of your medication and any documents you need to bring with you. This will not only save time at your appointment, but will make sure you don't forget anything essential, too.

## Plan your travel

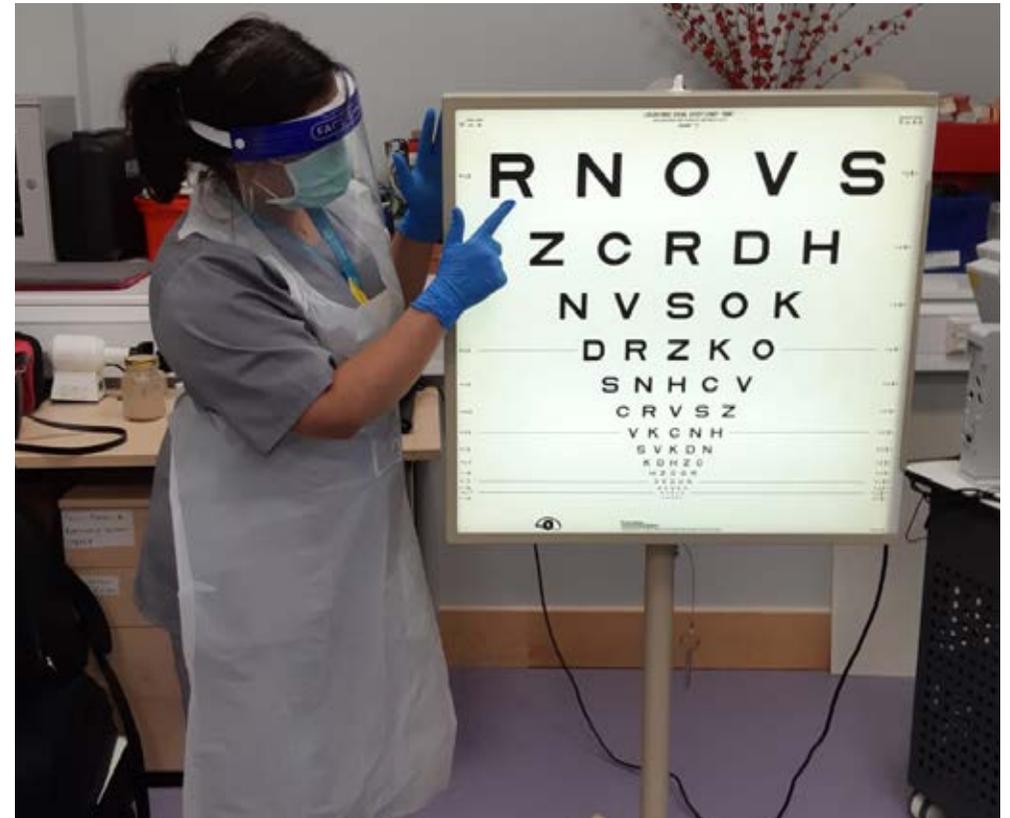
Organise how you will get to your appointment well in advance.

If you book volunteer patient transport support (for example, via the GoodSAM app) or a taxi, you may need to wear some form of personal protective equipment (PPE), like a face mask.

If you travel via public transport, you must wear a face covering unless there is a medical reason that you cannot.

A face covering isn't the same as the surgical masks or respirators used by healthcare and other workers as part of PPE. A cloth face covering should cover your mouth and nose while allowing you to breathe comfortably. It can be as simple as a scarf or bandana that ties behind your head.

For more guidance, check out the UK transport and travel advice at [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus).



## What to expect at your appointment

The current in-clinic experience is likely to be quite different to what you may be used to. These changes have been put in place to help keep patients and staff safe.

### Some of the changes you might encounter are:

- One person per appointment: as with most NHS services at present, only the patient alone is permitted to enter the consulting area. You may be allowed to bring someone into the waiting area with you, but this varies by hospital.
- One in, one out policy: this means that you often won't be allowed into the clinic waiting room. Instead you may be asked to wait outside and be called in directly for your appointment.
- Social distancing: in line with government guidance, staff and patients remaining two metres away from each other wherever possible.
- Staff wearing medical uniforms/scrubs and/or PPE.
- More regular sanitising of surfaces and cleaning or disinfecting.

## Get in touch

If you're worried about your vision, we're here for you.

Sight Advice FAQ is an online directory of information to support people living with sight loss and has a dedicated section around coronavirus. Visit [sightadvicefaq.org.uk](https://sightadvicefaq.org.uk)

Contact our Sight Loss Advice Service on **0303 123 9999** or visit [rnib.org.uk/eyehealth](https://rnib.org.uk/eyehealth)

