

**URGENT COMMUNICATION
TO: OPHTHALMIC CONTRACTORS****Cc Chief Executives, HSC Trusts
For cascade to appropriate teams**23rd March 2020

Dear Colleagues

RE: COVID-19: Advice for Ophthalmic Contractors

On 19 March 2020, the HSCB provided advice and guidance for Optometry Contractors in the current COVID-19 Pandemic. This letter is to advise of the current situation in relation to the provision of Ophthalmic Services, both General Ophthalmic Services and Enhanced Services.

As of 24 March 2020 the following situation applies:

- All routine General Ophthalmic Services should be suspended with immediate effect from 24 March 20
- Only essential and urgent eyecare services should be provided
- All domiciliary eyecare services should be suspended

This approach is in line with other UK eyecare policy and is consistent with College of Optometrists' advice and that from the Regulator:

<https://www.college-optometrists.org/the-college/media-hub/news-listing/coronavirus-2019-advice-for-optometrists.html>

https://www.optical.org/en/news_publications/news_item.cfm/goc-response-to-the-covid-19-coronavirus-emergency

In taking this action HSC Board will seek to maintain essential and urgent primary eyecare services by providing a minimum level of cover, triage, and advice by telephone, email or virtual consultation.

There is an expectation that HSC Board and contractor group will seek to develop cluster level services to both cope with practice closures, and to ensure continuation of essential and urgent eye care services.

Ophthalmic Services will work to ensure that capacity-releasing measures are in place to utilise, where possible, primary care optometry skills and experience in alternative settings (e.g. optometry independent prescribers in eye casualty or, primary care COVID-19 centres) or non-professional staff assisting in the delivery of medicines to vulnerable groups.

It is anticipated that clarification on financial sustainability measures will follow as soon as is possible and may be predicated on Contractors being willing to provide a level of service provision.

Finally, HSC Board recognises the important implications around availability of appropriate Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and is working to achieve solutions for this issue.

Please be assured that HSCB will provide further communications as the situation evolves.

Kind regards

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Health and Social Care