

My routine diabetic retinal screening appointment has been cancelled, is this ok?

All routine retinal screening appointments for patients with diabetes in Northern Ireland have been postponed due to the COVID-19 situation.

These appointments are extremely important in preventing avoidable sight loss for people with diabetes.

The photographs taken enable clinicians to pick up the very earliest signs of disease caused by diabetes in your eyes. Treatment offered, or lifestyle changes based on these findings, are very important in the fight against sight loss due to diabetes.

However, it is also important to know that a delay of a few months at this time is safer than attending for appointments and increasing your risk of contracting the virus. It is very unlikely that during that time you would develop diabetic retinopathy that cannot be treated.

We would therefore recommend that:

1. You look after your general health as best you can during this time and contact your GP if you feel that your diabetic control is not as good as it should be.
2. You seek immediate help should you notice any sudden change in your vision. This includes double vision, blurring, floating bits or flashes in your vision.

Public Health Agency Screening Lead, Dr Tracy Owen commented: "Invitations will be re-issued and appointments re-arranged when the screening programme starts up again. The programme will do everything it can to ensure screening invitations and appointments are prioritised appropriately."

In the first instance call your local optician for advice, as most are offering emergency eye care services and they will also be able to direct you as to how to get emergency support locally.

You could also look up the NI Direct [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) health services page](#).

You can find more information online at <http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/coronavirus/#Opticians>.

Additionally, a new Diabetes helpline and email support service has been launched in response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) by the Diabetes Network for NI. You can contact the service through the following:

Helpline Number: 028 9536 0600

Helpline Email: diabetic.helpline@hscni.net

And if you are still having difficulty you can contact your local A&E department. Do not arrive at A&E without an appointment - always call first. Don't ignore sudden changes in your vision as there are still emergency eye care services available to those who need them.

When services start to return to normal, we would recommend that: You have a routine eye examination if it has been over 12 months since your last one, or if you feel your vision has changed. It is likely that you will be able to get an eye examination quicker than your routine screening and optometrists are able to spot signs of diabetic change as part of a routine eye examination.

Notes to Editor

For media enquiries please contact Aideen Kennedy on Mobile: 07763 579 141, or via email - aideen.kennedy@rnib.org.uk

For interviews with Dr Tracy Owen from the PHA, you can contact PHA Corporate and Public Affairs through the following link - pha.cpa@hscni.net

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