



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Y Grŵp Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
Health and Social Services Group

17 March 2020

Dear Colleagues,

On 12 March 2020, Wales and the rest of the UK moved from the 'containment phase' to the 'delay phase' of our response to COVID-19.

At this time, we are not aware of any optometry team members who have tested positive for COVID-19 in Wales. However, we are aware of the concern this pandemic is causing and we want to give clarity and direction to optometry teams.

The Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and the Health Boards are updating pandemic flu plans and more details will emerge in the coming days and weeks to support you in working through COVID-19 at a local level. The purpose of this letter is to focus on what that means in practical terms for optometry teams and practices in Wales.

It is our professional, personal and moral obligation to take care of our communities, ourselves, families and colleagues at this time. We all need to stay vigilant in this evolving situation. Please ensure you keep up to date with advice and publications from the Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and the Health Boards.

<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>

It is becoming clear, providing routine optometric services 'as normal' is no longer sustainable as people in vulnerable groups (older people and those with underlying health conditions) need to reduce their inter person and close personal contact. In addition, aerosol generating procedures, such as removal of a foreign body with an Alger brush, should be avoided in this delay phase due to the increased risk of virus transmission.

We are aware that practices and services are experiencing growing numbers of DNAs (Did Not Attend) and cancellations. We need to take action to protect the public and optometry teams and move to AMBER alert.

Optometry alert level Amber	Normal optometric services are affected and some/ all routine care is no longer possible	Emergency treatment for infected patients at designated sites and emergency treatment for non-infected patients at multiple sites.	Optometric activity levels are reduced
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**The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Alert published on 13 March 2020 provided clarification to optometrists around the actions needed as we move to the delay phase of the COVID-19 response.**

The Alert confirmed a significant change to how we identify and manage potential cases of COVID-19. Advice for NHS organisations in Wales is now as follows:

The public and also staff are being advised to stay at home (self-isolate) without any testing for COVID-19, regardless of travel history or contact with confirmed cases, if they have: A new continuous cough or a high temperature (of 37.8 degrees centigrade or higher. It also included the following advice:

### Guidance for Health Care Workers

- Healthcare workers should wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (aprons, gloves and a fluid repellent mask whilst assessing and treating patients; gowns, gloves, FFP3 masks and eye protection) whilst performing aerosol generating procedures.
- Healthcare workers should follow the guidance for the general public and stay at home for 14 days if they develop any symptoms.
- Healthcare workers do not need to be tested for COVID-19, prior to returning to work.

*Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.*

*We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.*

**We have interpreted the first bullet point of this advice to be relevant to ophthalmology teams providing eye care (that cannot be delayed) to infected cases in designated Urgent/Emergency Centres. It would not be practicable or necessary for all optometry teams in practices and services to have FFP3 masks.**

Therefore from today:

1. Optometry teams need to establish if a patient who has a booked appointment is a potentially infective case prior to visit, by phone or text or on arrival. Use clearly visible and bilingual instructions at the practice entrance.
2. Given the potential risk of asymptomatic cases attending in this 'delay phase' it seems sensible and necessary to reduce exposure of staff and patients to infection by avoiding all aerosol generating procedures.
3. Reduce the number of routine check-ups by cancelling patients from vulnerable groups (and offer to anyone who wishes to do so) to reduce the need to travel and to have close contact with people in waiting rooms and surgeries.
4. Cancellation of all domiciliary eye care and the Low Vision Service Wales.
5. Provide released capacity to treat urgent eye care problems (on those who are well and/or in time who have recovered) and provide care that cannot be delayed.
6. Use robust infection control procedures, wiping down surfaces between patients with extra vigilance and ensuring thorough hand washing techniques are adhered to.

Practices will receive a monthly NHS income (GOS, EHEW and LVSU) based on the practice average NHS claims over the previous three-year period (2017-18; 2018-19; 2019-20). Practices are asked to record and monitor their activity through GOS, EHEW and LVSU during this period for health board analysis.

Practices need to make sure they review their business continuity plans and working with local health boards and practice optometry teams, ensure patients and the public can access urgent care and advice in normal opening hours.

Please make sure practice answer machine messages, websites and all communications are accurate and accessible.

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Please also be prepared for optometry teams to work in other ways to support local efforts. Optometry teams have transferable skills and released capacity may be required to support the NHS effort locally in the challenging weeks ahead.

This is truly an evolving situation and we all need to take a leadership and proactive stance to ensure we are doing our part to delay the spread of COVID-19 to protect ourselves and the communities around us.

I will continue to work with key stakeholders to support the whole profession through this extremely difficult and challenging period. Weekly telephone calls will continue between Welsh Government, Optometry Wales, Welsh Optometric Committee, Health Education and Improvement Wales and health board Clinical Leads and all Optometric Advisers. Approachable at all times, please do not hesitate to contact any of the above groups during this difficult period.

More detailed guidance and advice will follow locally.

Yours sincerely,



**David O'Sullivan**

Chief Optometric Adviser / Prif Optometrig Ymgynghorol  
Swyddfa'r Prif Swyddog Meddygol / Office of the Chief Medical Officer  
Directorate of Health Policy / Cyfarwyddiaeth Polisi Iechyd  
Department for Health and Social Services / Yr Adran Iechyd a Gwasanaethau  
Cymdeithasol  
Welsh Government / Llywodraeth Cymru  
Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ / Parc Cathays, Caerdydd CF10 3NQ

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