

Programme changes to NHS Diabetic Eye Screening in England

Communications toolkit to support the
implementation of OCT

September 2024



Purpose of toolkit

This toolkit is designed to support communications around the introduction of **Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT)** into the NHS Diabetic Eye Screening Programme in England from October 2024.

Please use the materials in this toolkit to increase awareness of the change among your networks by:

- Ensuring relevant health services have this toolkit to support their communications
- Including information in your newsletters
- Incorporating messages in internal communications (e.g. email and staff bulletins/intranets)
- Ensuring information on diabetic eye screening is up to date



Background

Ophthalmology is one of the busiest specialties in the NHS, carrying out more than 500,000 operations every year (6% of the NHS total) and more than 7.5 million outpatient appointments.

Core ophthalmology services – dealing with cataracts, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration and diabetic eye conditions – are provided in almost every NHS trust in England.

The [GIRFT ophthalmology report](#) recommended the inclusion of OCT in the NHS Diabetic Eye Screening Programme to free up capacity, enabling more patients to be seen and treated effectively in a timely way.

From October 2024, OCT will be introduced into the digital surveillance pathway in England. This means all patients in the pathway will soon have access to an OCT scan, if they need it. The aim is that by October 2025 all services will offer OCT.

This change follows the successful introduction in October 2023 of 24-month screening intervals for patients who have had two consecutive eye screens that have shown no signs of diabetic retinopathy.

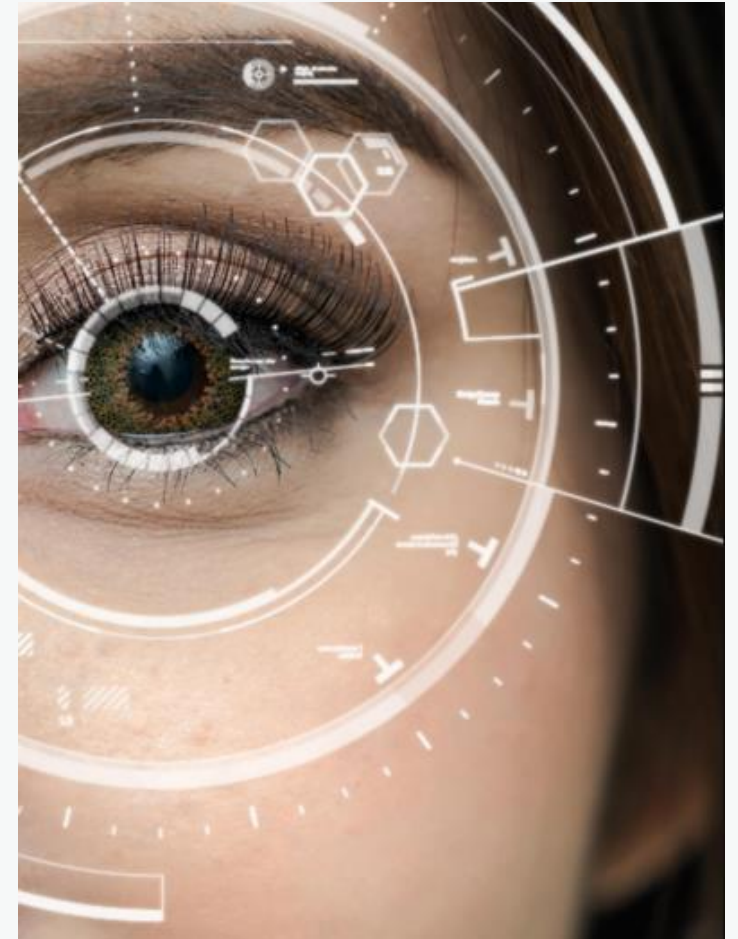
Overview

From October 2024, **Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT)** will be introduced into the **NHS Diabetic Eye Screening Programme in England**. This means all patients in the digital surveillance pathway will have access to an OCT scan.

NHS England is making this change to:

- Reduce unnecessary referrals to Hospital Eye Services (HES), which are facing significant pressures
- Offer enhanced surveillance for people remaining in diabetic eye screening

The aim is that by October 2025 all services will offer OCT in digital surveillance.





Key messages

What's changing?

- From October 2024, all patients in England in the digital surveillance pathway will soon have access to an Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) scan, if they need it.
- The aim is that by October 2025 all services will offer OCT.

Why is the NHS diabetic eye screening programme in England introducing OCT?

- The [GIRFT ophthalmology report](#) recommended the inclusion of OCT in the NHS Diabetic Eye Screening Programme, enabling more patients to be seen and treated effectively in a timely way.
- OCT provides more accurate results so fewer patients will be unnecessarily referred to hospital eye services.
- Where risk is low, patients will not need to wait for a hospital eye services referral appointment, freeing up capacity. Instead, they can be seen safely and conveniently for monitoring with their screening provider.
- Staff will receive training and gain new skills in OCT. This may improve staff retention across the programme.



Newsletter copy – short version

Rollout of Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) for people with diabetes

From October, NHS England will gradually introduce OCT into the NHS Diabetic Eye Screening Programme. The aim is that by October 2025 all services will offer OCT.

OCT gives more accurate results so fewer patients will need a referral to hospital eye services. Patients at low risk of developing eye problems can instead be seen by their local screening provider. Each provider will identify the small number of people who might need hospital treatment, making the referral process more efficient and freeing up hospital capacity.



Newsletter copy – long version

NHS England to offer Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) for people with diabetes

From October, NHS England will start to introduce OCT into the NHS Diabetic Eye Screening Programme.

Diabetic retinopathy is the second most common cause of blindness in the working age population. Diabetic eye screening helps detect problems early and is offered to everyone aged 12 or over who has diabetes.

An OCT scan detects changes to the eye that don't show up in colour photography, such as a thickening of the retina. OCT gives more accurate results so fewer patients will need a referral to hospital eye services. Patients at low risk of developing eye problems can instead be seen by their local screening provider. Each provider will identify the small number of people who might need hospital treatment, making the referral process more efficient and freeing up hospital capacity.

The introduction of OCT in the Diabetic Eye Screening Programme follows a recommendation in the GIRFT ophthalmology report. Staff will be offered training in OCT systems over the coming months. The aim is that by October 2025 all services will offer OCT.

Ophthalmology is one of the busiest specialties in the NHS, carrying out more than 500,000 operations every year and more than 7.5 million outpatient appointments.

Core ophthalmology services are provided in almost every NHS trust in England. They deal with diabetic eye conditions as well as cataracts, glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration.

More information

www.nhs.uk/diabeticseye

www.nhs.uk/retinopathy

www.gov.uk/diabetic-retinopathy-leaflet

www.gov.uk/diabetic-screening-easy-read

[OCT in diabetic eye screening \(gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/diabetic-screening-easy-read)

[Diabetic eye screening intervals extended for people at lowest risk \(gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/diabetic-screening-easy-read)

[FutureNHS Diabetic Eye Screening page](#)

[FutureNHS OCT briefing – recording and slides](#)

[FutureNHS OCT & R2 FAQs](#)

[FutureNHS OCT communications materials](#)

For any general questions, please contact england.screening@nhs.net

