



THE COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRISTS

The College of Optometrists

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Following the national lockdowns announced in Scotland and England at the beginning of the month, and earlier lockdowns in Wales and Northern Ireland, some members of The College of Optometrists have been in contact with us to express concerns that their employers are not following the College's amber phase guidance or other national guidance on good clinical practice.

While it has been made clear by all UK health authorities that primary care can continue, the College's amber phase guidance does not mean business as usual.

The safety of both practice staff and patients is paramount. Employers have a duty of care to staff and patients, and we would expect all practices to review their procedures to ensure that care is delivered in the safest way possible, and is compliant with both the College and relevant national and local guidance.

In particular, practices should:

- prioritise emergency/urgent and essential care on a needs- and symptoms-led basis, as determined by an optometrist
- only see patients for routine care if there is capacity to do so and if it is in their best interests, and considering their risk of COVID-19 infection
- provide remote optometrist-led patient triage, to ascertain those who need face-to-face care and those who can be managed remotely
- offer to defer routine appointments to asymptomatic patients at highest risk of COVID-19
- offer remote care, including dispensing, whenever possible
- maintain infection prevention and control (IPC) procedures and social distancing in practices, and provide optometrists with suitable time between appointments to carry out IPC
- avoiding online booking unless suitable triage is in place to prioritise patients based on optical need, and to screen them for symptoms of COVID-19
- give all staff the opportunity to update their individual COVID-19 risk assessment if they feel their situation has changed, and put in place suitable mitigations as needed.

It is key that optometrists are enabled to use their clinical judgement to assess and triage patients' needs prior to their appointment, and supported to manage them in the safest way possible. We are advising all members who raise concerns about employers with us to notify their practice manager or professional services teams, following their practice's 'raising a concern' procedure. We ask that employers make clear the route for staff to raise their concerns if they believe that guidelines aren't been followed, and encourage a culture where clinical staff feel safe and supported to do so.



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We also ask that all of your practices and their staff, including non-registrant practice and regional managers, are aware of and required to follow College guidance, the relevant national guidance and the COVID-19 related GOC statements on practice during the pandemic.

Yours sincerely

Ian Humphreys

Chief Executive

The College of Optometrists