

**BY EMAIL**

**To: All NI General Ophthalmic Service Contractors**

17 June 2020

Dear Colleague

**Move to Phase 1 of Ophthalmic Services Re-building Plan**

I am writing to notify you that, further to my letter of 7 April 2020 on the strategic plan for primary care ophthalmic services during Covid-19, I am now able to provide you with a firm date for the commencement of Phase 1 of the re-establishment of ophthalmic services. This will take place on **Monday, 29 June 2020**.

Phase 1 includes the main elements of routine eye care, including eye examinations and ophthalmic dispensing and the provision of Enhanced Services. It does not include domiciliary eyecare provision due to the higher level of COVID-19 risk. In addition, in order that GOS patients most in need are prioritised, it is anticipated that in Phase 1 routine eyecare will be available for those patients presenting with ocular symptoms, visual needs or medical needs, with “routine reminder”-generated activity recommencing at Phase 2. This is to give practices an opportunity to manage demand with respect to anticipated capacity challenges due to social distancing and infection prevention control measures whilst ensuring that citizens most in need are prioritised.

The move to Phase 1 on 29<sup>th</sup> June is consistent with the five guiding principles set out in the Northern Ireland Executive document *Coronavirus: Executive Approach to Decision-Making*. In addition, the recent survey of preparedness of Northern Ireland ophthalmic practices found that 67% were fully able, and 33% were partly able, to comply with social distancing requirements and 90% of practices reported they had amended their practice procedures; evidence of preparedness to move to Phase 1 of rebuilding services.

It is important to note that the SARS-CoV2 virus still poses a significant public health threat to the Northern Ireland population. It is therefore essential that optometrists closely follow the operational guidance hosted at the following link (or [click here to read](#))  
[http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/PrimaryCare\\_OPHServices\\_OperationalGuidance\\_170620.pdf](http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/PrimaryCare_OPHServices_OperationalGuidance_170620.pdf)

This guidance sets out how practices should prepare for the re-establishment of primary eyecare and General Ophthalmic Services. Further guidance and Enhanced Service updates to assist practitioners will follow in due course, and will complement already available guidance from the College of Optometrists, GOC, and other sources.

HSC Board will in turn seek your declaration of assurances on this in preparation for service resumption. Please click on the link, or scan the QR code below, to read and action your COVID-19 Practice Assurance return/declaration. **It is essential that this return is received by HSCB for each Contractor practice.**

Optometry Contractor COVID-19 Assurance Return:



<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/DSX7FV9>

I will write to you in the coming weeks to provide you with a firm date for the transition to Phase 2.

In addition, the resumption of non-urgent ophthalmic activity will require amendments to be made to the temporary Covid-19 financial support arrangements. Further details will be provided in the near future.

There will be challenges for all of you in the coming weeks as you work to resume services in your practice, encourage your staff and care for your patients. I would like to assure you that you have the full support of HSC Board, myself and my team in Ophthalmic Services and wish you and your staff well.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'R' followed by a horizontal line that ends in a small arrowhead.

Raymond Curran  
Head of Ophthalmic Services  
*Enc*

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