

COVID-19 UPDATE

FAQ Sheet

What exactly is COVID-19?

COVID-19 refers to the respiratory illness caused by a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), which means it is new to humans. There are many different virus families and coronavirus is just one of them; several coronaviruses already commonly affect humans and also cause respiratory disease. Symptoms of COVID-19 range from mild to severe and include fever, sore throat, cough, loss of smell, and shortness of breath. In the elderly and those with multiple medical problems such as diabetes and heart disease, or for those who are immunocompromised, there is an increased risk of acute respiratory distress syndrome and pneumonia, which in some may lead to serious illness, complications, and death. Part of why COVID-19 has become a pandemic is because individuals may not exhibit any symptoms for 1-2 weeks after exposure and infection, and there is also evidence that asymptomatic spread is possible.

How can coronavirus affect your eyes?

The eyes, along with the mouth and nose, can be an entry point for the coronavirus to be contracted. When an infected individual coughs, sneezes, or talks, droplets containing virus particles are released. These tiny droplets can land on surfaces or end up on the infected individual's hands. Some may linger in the air for a period of time. You can then become infected by shaking that person's hands or touching contaminated surfaces and in turn touching your eyes or other parts of your face. Inhaling aerosolized virus is another potential route of infection. This is why social distancing, frequent handwashing, and sanitizing wipe downs of commonly touched surfaces are so important.

We have seen evidence that some individuals who are positive for the novel coronavirus may develop conjunctivitis (red or pink eyes). However, please keep in mind that seasonal allergies and other common cold viruses also cause conjunctivitis. If you should develop red eyes and discharge, do not panic, but instead notify your general ophthalmologist for further evaluation.

Who should schedule a visit?

We have focused our services mainly to those who need their intravitreal injections, post-operative care, and those with sight-threatening ocular emergencies. In keeping with state and federal guidelines aimed at conserving healthcare resources during this pandemic, we may delay surgeries and procedures that are not emergencies.

Patients should contact us for an appointment if:

- You have macular degeneration or diabetic retinopathy and have been receiving regular eye injections
- You have had recent retina surgery
- You notice sudden changes in your vision (like blurry, wavy or blank spots in your field of vision)
- You notice many new floaters or flashes in your vision
- You experience a sudden decrease in vision
- You develop eye pain, headache, red eye, nausea and vomiting

What to expect in our offices during a visit

Patients will notice and experience a streamlined process during their visit. We want to assure you that we are following universal precautions and guidelines put forth by the CDC, the American Academy of Ophthalmology, and NJ/PA/DE

state public health departments, with the safety of our patients and staff in mind. We are continually reviewing and updating our clinical operations as these recommendations evolve. These include:

- Proper handwashing and sanitizing techniques
- Sanitizing wipe down of examination room after each patient with particular attention to frequently touched areas
- Body temperature screening of all patients, employees, and doctors as they enter the office
- Patient screening questionnaires as per national and state guidelines to identify those who may be at increased risk for exposure to coronavirus
- Those who do not pass the body temperature or screening questions are asked to self-quarantine in order to protect our staff and patients. If a COVID-positive or exposed individual requires urgent retinal evaluation, separate arrangements will be made to see them at a special COVID-unit at Wills Eye Hospital.
- Adherence to recommendations of social distancing and safety in our waiting areas, including the option for patients to wait in their car after the check-in process is complete until it is their turn to be seen

Additionally, in keeping with the latest recommendation as of early April from the CDC, we strongly encourage all of our patients to cover their nose and mouth with a cloth face covering when they come in for their office visit, or wear a mask if they have one. This can help protect you and those around you.

Eyecare during the COVID-19 outbreak

If your insurance allows you to get more than one month of necessary eye medicine (like glaucoma drops), you should try to stock up. Some insurers will approve a 3-month supply of medication in times of natural disaster. Ask your pharmacist or ophthalmologist for help if you have trouble getting approval from your insurance company. As always, request a refill as soon as you are due and don't wait until the last minute to contact the pharmacy. Avoid rubbing your eyes. It can be hard to break this common habit, but doing so will help lower your risk of infection. If you feel an urge to itch or rub your eye or even to adjust your glasses, use a tissue instead of your fingers. Dry eyes can lead to more rubbing, so consider adding moisturizing lubricant eye drops 3-4 times a day to your daily routine. If you must touch your eyes for any reason — even to administer eye medicine — wash your hands first with soap and water for at least 20 second and remember to wash them again afterwards.

Precautions

- **Frequent hand washing.** We touch things all the time and we also touch our face all the time. Washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds is very effective for destroying the coronavirus and many other germs. If a sink is not available, hand sanitizers with at least 65-70% alcohol are also effective.
- **Social distancing.** Maintaining 6 feet or more of separation is important to reduce person-to-person transmission. This is important to do whether you are just walking around your house or at the pharmacy.
- **Stay home if you are sick.** Don't spread your germs! Self-quarantine and contact your PCP if you are not feeling better with some rest and to see if viral testing is indicated. Cough into your elbow, or into a tissue that you promptly discard instead of coughing into your hand.
- **Sanitize surfaces.** Wipe down high touch areas in your house and car with Clorox or similar wipes. It is safe and reasonable to receive and consume food or groceries that are delivered, but pre-pay the tip and have it left on your doorstep. It may also be prudent to use a disinfecting wipe to wipe down the outside surfaces of packaging.
- **Wear a cloth face covering or mask when you leave your house.**