

COVID-19 AND MACULAR DISEASE

ESSENTIAL PATIENT AND CARER INFORMATION AS AT APRIL 2020



Macular
Disease
Foundation
AUSTRALIA

The macular disease community faces unique challenges during the uncertain times brought about by COVID-19. We want all Australians to emerge from the coronavirus pandemic with their best vision.

The team at Macular Disease Foundation Australia is working remotely and has the technology in place to ensure that our National Helpline **1800 111 709** and other information services remain in place. Please log onto our website for the latest information.

NOTE: The circumstances mentioned in this fact sheet assume you are well and have not been exposed to COVID-19. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you been exposed to a known case of COVID-19 or have recently travelled from overseas, you should remain in quarantine, but also seek immediate advice from your treating ophthalmologist or optometrist over the phone.

FAQs

1. What happens to my regular eye appointments while I'm in self-isolation?

Many non-essential eye appointments are being rescheduled and your ophthalmologist or optometrist will advise if that's the case. Some eye treatments are designated as "essential", including eye injections and laser treatment.

2. Should I attend my eye injections?

Yes, it is critically important for people receiving eye injections for wet (neovascular) age-related macular

degeneration (wet AMD), diabetic macular edema or a range of other macular conditions to continue receiving their scheduled treatment.

If you stop treatment, you risk irreversibly damaging your vision. **Any such loss may be permanent and may not be recoverable even with future treatment.**

Eye injections are considered "essential medical care or treatment". If you leave your home to attend scheduled appointments for injections – or to take someone in your care to their appointment – you are not in breach of Australian Government COVID-19 Health Guidelines.

MDFA strongly recommends you continue eye injection treatment, unless otherwise advised by your ophthalmologist. Clinics operate in sterile environments and have stringent practices in place to protect patients and staff.

TIP: Call MDFA's National Helpline **1800 111 709** for advice if you're unsure what to do.

3. What happens if I have an emergency with my eyes?

Any sudden loss of vision is an eye emergency. In addition, please contact your ophthalmologist if you experience:

- Eye pain or discomfort
- Recent change in vision
- New red eye signs or symptoms
- Flashes of light or new floaters in your vision
- Recent eye trauma
- New onset double vision

FAQs cont.

If you are not currently being treated by an ophthalmologist, contact your optometrist.

Eye emergencies are considered “essential medical care or treatment” and you will not be breaching Australian Government health guidelines to seek help for yourself, or someone in your care.

TIP: Early action saves sight so don't delay in contacting your optometrist or ophthalmologist immediately if you notice major changes in your vision.

4. How can I protect my vision at home?

More than ever it's important that you are self-monitoring for any changes in your vision by using an Amsler grid.

Using an Amsler grid is easy, takes no more than a minute or two. An Amsler grid is no substitute for a proper eye examination, but it will help you monitor for vision changes in between times. If you're over 50, you should use an Amsler grid weekly. If you are diagnosed with a macular condition, check the Amsler grid daily.

It also helps to eat the right foods, get regular exercise and quit smoking. Eye friendly diets are packed with daily serves of dark green leafy vegetables and fruit, oily fish two or three times a week. Try to reduce fats and oils, eat low GI carbohydrates and have a handful of nuts a week.

TIP: Get a FREE Amsler grid by calling MDFA on **1800 111 709**. We also have some great Macula Menus for eye friendly meal ideas.

5. What happens if I live in an aged care facility?

The Australian Government has announced that residential aged care facilities should take extra precautions to keep residents safe from COVID-19.

Some facilities are restricting visitors or permitting only visitors under strict conditions. Please check with your aged care facility about their protocols.

Aged care residents with wet AMD who are already receiving sight saving eye injections should be permitted to leave their facility for this essential medical treatment, and to return. Eye injections are categorised as urgent and essential medical treatment as per RANZCO National Triage Guidelines for all eye health. Residents or their families should discuss this with facility management.

TIP: From 1 May 2020 you must have your flu vaccination to enter an aged care facility.

MDFA supporting you

MDFA is only a phone call away **1800 111 709** and we're here to help you with the latest advice on protecting your vision during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have suspended our face-to-face seminars indefinitely, but we have plenty of online webinars, and our social media and website is continually being updated.

We also have lots of tips and tricks for living well with low vision, using vision aids, diet and lifestyle advice, navigating government services and more!

 Helpline 1800 111 709

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