

# Diabetic eye screening and coronavirus

## When you will receive a screening invitation

The Northern Ireland Diabetic Eye Screening Programme (NIDESP) was paused for most people in March 2020 in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Screening continued for pregnant women and a small number of priority patients only.

Work is ongoing to restore the programme safely while implementing social distancing and COVID-19 infection control measures. This means that a much smaller number of patients will be able to be seen at each clinic. Your appointment may also be at a different venue than the one you are used to attending.

In line with other regions of the UK, people who are at greatest risk of sight loss are being prioritised as the service is restored.

## Extended screening intervals for those at lowest risk of sight loss

If you had no diabetic retinopathy detected at your most recent screening tests, you are in the lowest risk group and can expect to wait longer than normal for your next screening appointment.

Evidence in recent years, endorsed by the UK National Screening Committee, has shown that it is safe for you to wait up to 24 months between screening appointments. The chance of you developing sight-threatening retinopathy between these appointments is very small.

Extending the screening interval for those people who are at lowest risk, will allow the limited appointments we have available at this time to be targeted to those who are at higher risk.

## What to do while you wait for your screening invite

While you wait for your next screening invite, it is important to be symptom aware. If you have any problems with your vision before your next screening appointment please contact your optician or GP.

Keeping blood glucose levels, blood pressure and cholesterol within the target range is important for your eye health. More information can be accessed on the Diabetes UK website [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk) or contact your diabetes clinic.

## Safety at eye screening appointment

All steps are being taken by the diabetic eye screening service to keep you safe when you attend for screening. You will be asked to wear a face covering, attend alone if possible and you may have to wait outside until the time of your appointment. While the environment may be different, the process for taking the photograph of your eye will be the same as before.

If you have symptoms of coronavirus, or have been in contact with someone who does, you must not attend your eye screening appointment. Contact the DESP booking office and your appointment can be rearranged for a time after you have isolated.

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[Diabetes](#) is a common condition that affects approximately 4.7% of the population.

Around 87,000 people (and increasing) in Northern Ireland have been diagnosed with the condition. That's approximately 1 in every 22 people.

Diabetic eye screening is currently offered every year to patients aged 12 years and over. The only exception is people who have no light perception in either eye.

The aim of screening is to reduce the possible complications of diabetic retinopathy, which can cause sight loss and blindness. It is among the most common causes of blindness in people of working age.

If retinopathy is identified early - for example through screening - and treated appropriately, sight loss can be prevented in the majority of people with diabetes.

The Diabetic Eye Screening Programme (DESP) Regional Centre is based in Forster Green Hospital, but screening is carried out across Northern Ireland at GP practices and static sites.

Primary care practices have registers of patients with diabetes and this information is used to identify the people who need to be invited for screening. People eligible for screening will be invited at least once a year.

The appointment booking office is at Belfast Trust and can be contacted on **028 96 157600**

## **Annual report**

## **Further information**

[Information for people with diabetes, their families and carers.](#)

[Information for health professionals.](#)

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