



COVID-19: Patient Update

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way Americans go about their daily lives, including why and when they might leave home for medical appointments and care. As such, retina specialists have been hard at work consulting with public health agencies and organizations to determine the best and safest ways to care for our patients.

For the health and safety of patients, caregivers, retina specialists and their staff, and in accordance with guidelines from many state health departments, the American Society of Retina Specialists and the US Surgeon General, retina specialists are only seeing patients for visits considered “essential” at this time which includes certain emergencies, time-sensitive treatments and follow-up for recent surgeries.

Limiting some patient visits can help stop the transmission of COVID-19 through social distancing and will preserve needed medical supplies for hospitals treating patients with the virus. Please contact your retina specialist via phone with any questions about your care during the pandemic.

What patient visits will continue?

Essential patient visits may include:

- New emergency patients
- Patients receiving eye injections, also known as intravitreal injection therapy
- Patients who recently had surgery and need follow-up care
- Patients with active infectious or inflammatory eye diseases
- Patients experiencing sudden changes in vision: floaters, flashes, or loss of vision

What should I know about visiting my retina specialist at this time?

Contact your retina specialist by phone to determine if your in-person visits will continue. Prior to your appointment, let your retina specialist know if you or anyone you have been near have symptoms of a viral infection including fever, cough or shortness of breath or if you have traveled outside of the state or come into contact with a person infected with COVID-19 in the past two weeks. If you or a loved one have signs of a viral illness or your travel history indicates a higher risk, your retina specialist will speak with you about your situation and the best next steps.

During a visit with your retina specialist, you should enter the clinic alone if possible, with caregivers remaining outside during the appointment. You may be asked to wait in your car and the staff may call your cell phone when the doctor is ready to see you. If you do come inside, you’ll be asked to stay at least six feet away from others in the waiting room.

Your appointment may be shorter than usual and your doctor may provide your treatment without retinal dilation or extensive examination if there have been no changes to your eyesight since your last

visit. During your appointment, your retina specialist may wear personal protective equipment such as a face mask or shield to keep both of you safe.

Intravitreal injections

Retina specialists care for many patients that need eye injections, or intravitreal injections, because of conditions that could cause permanent vision loss without timely treatment. Intravitreal injections are used to administer medications to treat a variety of retinal conditions including age-related macular degeneration (AMD), diabetic retinopathy, retinal vein occlusion and uveitis. Some infections are also treated with injections and in some cases, injections are used to aid repair of a retinal detachment. Stopping treatment with eye injections can increase the risk of vision loss for many patients including some with AMD. Because these treatments can ward off vision loss and may improve vision, they should not be cancelled or postponed without speaking to your retina specialist and should be continued if at all possible.

Keeping safe and healthy through the pandemic

As most public health agencies have advised, it's critical that we all wash our hands often for at least 20 seconds and try not to touch our faces. That includes our eyes. When a person infected with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or talks they can transmit the virus via droplets that could be inhaled by another person via their nose or mouth. Droplets could also be transferred from a hard surface onto your hands. So keeping your hands away from your nose and mouth, and making sure not to rub your eyes, can help keep you safe.

Talk to your retinal specialist about any changes you should make to your currently eyecare routine. If you wear contact lenses, your retina specialist may suggest you switch to glasses since those who wear glasses tend to touch their eyes less often. Also wearing glasses may protect against foreign material, including COVID-19 virus droplets, entering your eye.

While many states and localities recommend that individuals stay at home to stop the spread of COVID-19, remember that your ongoing eye medical care will be met by your retina specialist. It is important to stock up on any eye medicine prescriptions and over-the-counter supplies you might need. In some instances, travel restrictions may be imposed – currently those restrictions/closures are not applicable to patients travelling for ongoing urgent/emergent medical care.

Resources

Information from the American Academy of Ophthalmology on Coronavirus Eye Safety

<https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/coronavirus-covid19-eye-infection-pinkeye>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) information on Coronavirus Symptoms and Testing

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>