



EUROPEAN COALITION FOR VISION
Better Eye Health For Europe

European Coalition for Vision
199 Gloucester Terrace
London
W2 6LD
United Kingdom
[44] 20 7298 5151
<http://www.ecvision.eu/>

13 July 2020

Dear MEP

We hope you and your family are well and have coped with the disruption and stresses during the acute phases of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Life has changed a lot since we wrote to you on 1 January about our plans for 2020 Year of Vision. In fact, one of the health areas which has fallen behind massively during lockdown and self-isolation, is eye health. Ophthalmology clinics and optometrists' practices have been able to see only the tip of the iceberg of patients and eye pathologies will have built up unnoticed by sufferers. Unless these are identified and treated soon, we will see an increase in preventable and irreversible sight loss in all countries.

To address this, the ECV has published the statement below encouraging patients to seek help and reassuring them it is as safe as possible to do so. Anything you can do to help promote this message will help save people's sight, including amongst some of the most vulnerable groups in society, and will be most welcome.

We are also still on course to promote several seminal publications on sight loss and self-reported eye and vision problems in Europe later this year, to underline the importance of eye health in this key year - 2020 - Year of Vision.

I will write to you again about those later in the year and hope you will join us in our social media campaign supporting *Hope in Sight* for all on World Sight Day on 8 October 2020 when, we hope, that we will have COVID-19 under control across Europe.

Yours sincerely

David Hewlett
President
European Coalition for Vision

ECV statement on Eye Care 13 July 2020

European Coalition for Vision urges citizens to attend for eye care services and not to risk their eye health through fear of COVID-19

The European Coalition for Vision (ECV) is reminding people to consider their eye health and to contact their local ophthalmologist, optometrist or optician if they need help and for routine eye care, as Europe moves out of lockdown. Services are now as safe as they can possibly be with necessary safety measures in place across Europe.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, eye health has taken a back seat to fighting the virus across Europe apart from cases of emergency. Ophthalmologists, optometrists and opticians have kept in touch with patients in order to prioritise care. Nevertheless, in some countries, patients are missing appointments through fear and, in others, there are now backlogs for care, both of which are storing up serious vision problems for the future.

The ECV says people should be reassured and not miss out on essential eye care through fear. The staff you will meet will be trained staff or regulated healthcare professionals who are used to dealing with infectious diseases. Ophthalmology clinics are usually in infection free areas of hospitals, community optometric facilities are kept COVID-free and both are disinfected between patients. The fact that clinics no longer look the same should reassure you.

When you visit, you should experience high-levels of infection prevention and control (IPC) and staff wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) – gloves, masks and aprons or gowns or behind transparent screens. You may also be asked to wear a mask and gloves as well as washing or sanitising your hands thoroughly on arrival. You will not normally have to wait for appointments but, if you do, you will find the seats now spaced out and regularly cleaned together with other hard surfaces. Every eye professional will take every precaution to keep you as safe as possible and to protect you against the virus while meeting your eye health and vision needs. If you need spectacles, they will be cleaned and disinfected before you try them on.

ECV President David Hewlett said: “ We now have safety systems in place for enhanced infection prevention and control and personal protective equipment across Europe so no-one should be put off contacting an eye health professional or attending a clinic, if you have a problem or for routine eye care. Anyone with concerns should simply contact us in advance to check whether it is safe to attend. As countries across Europe we move out of lockdown, please seek help if anything does not seem right with your eyes or vision and please do not miss out on scheduled care or eye examinations. These are worrying times for everyone but, as eye health professionals we will do our best to look after your vision and eyes. We urge you not to put your eye health or vision at risk.”

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Notes

The European Coalition for Vision (ECV) is a volunteer alliance of professional bodies, patient groups, European NGOs, disabled people's organisations, trade associations representing suppliers, and research groups across Europe. The Coalition exists to raise the profile of eye health and vision, help prevent avoidable visual impairment and to secure an equal and inclusive society for those with irreversible blindness or low vision in Europe.

David Hewlett, previously Vice Chair of the UK charity Action for Blind People, Chief Executive of FODO - the UK Association of Eye Care Providers and ex-Department of Health UK, is a founding members of the Coalition and has been its second President, since 2017.