

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: March 24, 2020
From: Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N)
Subj: VHA Eye Care Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic
To: Network Directors (10N1-23)
Thru: Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Operations (10NC)

JRB

1. The purpose of this memorandum is to provide operational guidance for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) eye care services (ophthalmology and optometry) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The population of Veteran patients who receive eye care includes many geriatric patients with age-related diseases (cataract, glaucoma, diabetes, as well as routine glasses check) who are at higher risk for COVID-19 complications. This guidance is provided to maintain necessary care for Veterans while reducing risks to patients and staff, and to reduce the threat of COVID-19 to clinical operations.
2. Guidance is based on new recommendations from the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AOA) for urgent and non-urgent care, dated March 18, 2020 (<https://www.aao.org/headline/alert-important-coronavirus-context>); from the American Optometric Association, AOA guidance to doctors of optometry on the CDC March 17, 2020 announcement on coronavirus/COVID-19 crisis (<https://www.aoa.org/coronavirus?refer=rss>); American College of Surgeons, COVID-19 update: guidance for triage of non-emergent surgical procedures (<https://www.facs.org/about-acsc/covid-19>); and the Centers for Disease Control (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/guidance-hcf.html>).
3. Conjunctivitis (“red eye”) has been reported as a clinical sign on presentation of patients with COVID-19 infections, especially in the context of fever and respiratory symptoms. Conjunctival secretions have been found to be highly infectious and may aerosolize. Veterans under evaluation for COVID-19 should not be treated until testing has been completed.
4. Non-essential visits and routine appointments should be postponed per Medical center guidance or policy on rescheduling.

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5. Should you have questions regarding the guidance, please contact Dr. Glenn Cockerham, National Program Director for Ophthalmology at Glenn.Cockerham@va.gov, or 650-521-3523.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danny Graceli". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and "G".

for
Renee Oshinski