

NORTHERN IRELAND PRIMARY EYECARE ASSESSMENT & REFERRAL SERVICE

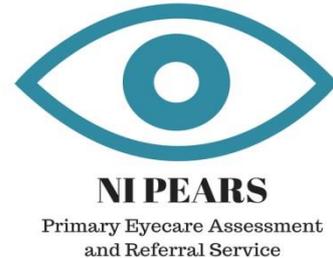
NI PEARS

ACUTE EYECARE INFORMATION FOR GP PRACTICES

PLEASE SHARE THIS WITH ALL GPs AND STAFF IN YOUR PRACTICE

NI PEARS is an HSC funded eye care service provided by primary care optometrists for patients who develop an **acute (sudden or very recent onset)** eye problem.

You may direct patients presenting with a new and acute (sudden or very recent onset) eye condition to an optometrist in an accredited optometry practice for investigation and management of their condition.



If the patient is eligible for the service the optometrist will provide an appointment within 48 hours and will investigate the patient's condition and either manage it, if it is a minor non-sight threatening condition, or triage the patient for appropriate onward referral if the condition is more serious and potentially sight threatening.

If the patient is not eligible for NIPEARS the optometrist will advise on how else they may have their condition managed.

Which Optometry practices provide NI PEARS?

NI PEARS is now available in most optometry practices across Northern Ireland.

Patients may be referred to any of the listed optometry practices. If the patient already attends one of these optometry practices they should be encouraged to attend their own practice.

Click on the link below for a list of optometry practices providing NI PEARS and for further information for patients:

<http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/eyes/>

Note: optometrists may only provide NI PEARS in their practice and cannot currently provide it in the domiciliary setting e.g. in a nursing home. A patient in residential care with an acute eye problem must continue to be managed by their GP.

What to ask and tell a patient about NI PEARS

- Most important question for staff to ask a patient presenting with an eye problem: **“How long have you had the problem?” If it is not of sudden or very recent onset then it is unlikely that they will be eligible for an NI PEARS assessment.**

If the patient’s eye problem is acute i.e. has come on suddenly and they are being directed to an optometry practice please **DO NOT** tell them that they will definitely receive an HSC funded i.e. “free” eye examination or that they will be seen immediately. There are criteria that the optometrist must apply to decide if a patient needs, and is eligible for, an NI PEARS examination.

The patient may instead require a routine sight test or some other type of examination and may sometimes not be eligible for a free examination.

- **Please advise the patient that they should contact the optometry practice for further advice on how to manage their condition and that they may be offered an NI PEARS examination if it is the most appropriate care for them.**
- If the optometrist decides that the patient needs an NI PEARS assessment an appointment will be provided within 48 hours. It is unlikely that they will be seen immediately but the urgency of their symptoms will be assessed and an appointment offered as soon as deemed necessary and within 48 hours.
- **Please advise the patient that the optometrist will decide how soon they need to be seen and while it may not be immediately it should be within 48 hours.**

Who may access the service?

NI PEARS REFERRAL Patient Eligibility – **INCLUSIONS**

The following patients may be referred for an NI PEARS assessment to a participating optometry practice.

1) **Patients presenting with sudden or very recent onset of acute eye related problems e.g. red eye, painful eye, sudden loss or disturbance of vision, sudden onset of flashes and floaters.**

AND

2) **Patients who have a current Health and Care Number (HCN).**

Note: patients without a HCN may still attend the optometrist but may be charged for the appointment.

Who may NOT access the service?

NI PEARS REFERRAL Patient Eligibility – EXCLUSIONS

The following patients are **NOT eligible** for referral for an NI PEARS Assessment:

1) Ophthalmic conditions requiring immediate, urgent referral to HES.

E.g. acute trauma, penetrating eye injury, chemical burn, orbital cellulitis. Patients with these ophthalmic conditions should be referred to secondary care immediately in line with Ophthalmology Referral guidance at link below:

Ophthalmology Referral Pathway for NI: Guidance for GPs and Optometrists

(click)<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/Ophthalmology%20Referral%20Pathway%20Poster%20for%20N%20Ireland%20Sept%202020.pdf>

2) Patients with long term/chronic ophthalmic conditions or minor longstanding symptoms e.g. long standing/previously diagnosed dry eye or blepharitis, recurrent trichiasis, long standing diplopia; unless the presenting sudden onset symptoms are for something unrelated to their chronic condition.

3) Patients within 6 weeks post operatively of eye surgery. Direct patient back to the hospital service where they had their surgery. Patient will have been given an information leaflet with contact numbers by the hospital. If in doubt contact Eye Casualty in BHSCT (RVH) or WHSCT (Altnagelvin) or, out of hours, the ophthalmologist on call in either hospital.

4) Children under 5 years old presenting with an acute eye condition must be seen either by their GP or, if their condition requires urgent investigation, contact either Eye Casualty service or the on call ophthalmologist.

5) Headaches (unless associated with sudden onset visual changes) - patients with acute headaches without ocular/visual symptoms require medical investigation. Patients with chronic headaches may be entitled to a General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) sight test, if eligible. Note: eligibility will depend on when the patient last had a GOS sight test– the optometrist can advise on this.

In all cases the optometrist can provide advice on how the patient may access services if they are not eligible for NIPEARS.

For further practice information or any queries about the NIPEARS service please contact any of the HSCB optometric advisers:

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