

BCLA Guidance Returning to Practice in COVID-19: Use of gloves in contact lens practice

The BCLA published its umbrella guidance on **returning to contact lens practice in Covid-19** in May 2020. We continue to review the published scientific evidence and consult with academics and topic experts to ensure that our published guidance remains accurate and contemporary. Those guidelines are now available in multiple languages to support our worldwide membership.

Our guidance, like many others published by various associations and bodies around the world, highlight the recommendation that gloves be worn by Eye Care Practitioners (ECPs), in accordance with PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) guidance issued by your local government and/or regulatory body. This is further supported by the direction to ensure that all practice colleagues understand the correct technique for handwashing¹ and to follow this.

Use of gloves in contact lens practice

It has not been common practice for ECPs to wear gloves when fitting contact lenses or caring for their contact lens patients prior to Covid-19. Many questions have been raised about the use of gloves including: ease of handling contact lenses when wearing gloves; any protocols that should be followed; and if there are any gloves that are more suitable? We can confirm that in answer to these, and similar, questions that there is no scientific evidence to use as a basis for response. Thus, ECPs are required to use their professional judgement to determine the right course of action to take.

In the absence of science fact regarding the use of gloves in the optometric consulting room and specifically with contact lenses, the BCLA would like to share its considered thoughts on this aspect of practice.

In the absence of well-fitting gloves that are changed appropriately ECPs should observe hand hygiene. Hand hygiene remains one of the key measures in preventing the spread of infection in any healthcare setting², with handwashing considered the most important measure in preventing the spread of infection. Soap and water are exceptionally effective in removing coronavirus (and other potentially harmful contaminants) from your skin^{3,4,5}. However, ECP's not wearing gloves may not be what the patient expects as the gold standard when they attend your

practice. This could lead to some difficult conversations, especially when they see the practice support colleagues potentially wearing gloves, and all healthcare professionals and associates in other settings doing the same.

If we think about the different tasks that might be completed within the consulting room during any appointment involving contact lenses or management of the ocular surface, the only task that (in our combined experiences) seems complicated by the wearing of gloves is the application and removal of the contact lens. All other tasks, we would suggest, can be completed with little or no change in the performance of the ECP. However, in the view of some ECPs even contact lens application and removal can become 'normal' in gloves with practice and familiarity.

Recommendation

With this in mind we would propose that steps be taken to adapt the 'routines' followed by ECPs such that the patient be asked to apply and remove their own contact lenses during any appointment (following the correct handwashing procedures themselves), thus allowing the ECP to choose to wear gloves throughout the consultation without impedence. The only scenario envisaged where an ECP might need to remove contact lenses is where a patient is unable to themselves, e.g. a new wearer or someone in difficulty. In this situation, the ECP can demonstrate visible hygiene by properly washing hands in front of the patient and explaining the rationale for removing gloves for the task. Once the lens is removed, they can then re-wash hands and re-apply a new pair of gloves.

Use of gloves in contact lens teaching

The above recommendation does also apply to contact lens clinics at Higher Education institutions which are open to the public. However, for university and college teaching of contact lenses, it is reasonable for students to not wear gloves while learning how to apply and remove lenses with a brief evaluation of contact lens fit in between as long as their hands are re-washed properly every time they fit the lenses.

Information correct at time of being published
18 November 2021.

1. https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/Hand_Hygiene_Why_How_and_When_Brochure.pdf

2. Lian et al. Infection control guidelines for optometrists, Clinical and Experimental Optometry 2016

3. Centre for Disease Control

4. World Health Organisation

5. Jones et al. The COVID-19 pandemic: Important considerations for contact lens practitioners. Contact Lens and Anterior Eye, June 2020