

How to use contact lenses and glasses safely during COVID-19: Patients' Top 10 Questions Answered by an Eyecare Expert

Professor Christina Grupcheva, leading European Ophthalmologist and Head of the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Science & Specialised Eye Hospital at the Medical University of Varna, Bulgaria, shares her advice and guidance on contact lenses, glasses safety and COVID-19:

Q1: Is it safe to use contact lenses during the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic?

A: There is no evidence that contact lens users are more likely or prone to contracting Coronavirus, or that contact lenses can transmit the disease. When all standard protective measures and instructions for use are followed correctly, contact lenses (soft or rigid) are generally a safe means of vision correction.

Q2: Should contact lens patients switch to wearing glasses at this time?

A: If patients are healthy, there is no need or proven benefits for them to change to wearing glasses during the pandemic. Contact lenses provide clear vision and a wider field of view, without having additional accessories weighing on the nose and ears.



Moreover, many contact lens wearers only have 'emergency glasses'. Switching to these could impact a patient's quality of vision and cause them to touch their face more often in order to adjust the frames. Patients may also squeeze and squint their eyes more, potentially causing tear film disruption and eye irritation. Wearing glasses can also trigger 'fogging' when worn alongside a face mask, meaning glasses need to be cleaned properly more regularly.

Q3: Do patients need a special 'wear and care' regime for their contact lenses?

Make sure you follow the guidance summarised below for healthy contact lens use.

1. Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water before application and removal of the lenses. Careful, long and thorough washing with soap and warm water is the best hand hygiene practice and should be incorporated into your contact lens usage.
2. Use a clean contact lens case which should be changed every month.
3. Use fresh contact lens solution and store the lenses according to the instructions. It is a common misconception that a virus such as COVID-19 can survive 8 hours in the solution – there is no evidence of this.
4. Apply the lens with the tip of a clean index finger, directly onto the cornea, avoiding lid contamination.
5. Dispose of the lens by wrapping it in clean tissue to avoid potential transmission of any infection.

6. Strictly follow recommendations on the packaging about the longevity of the contact lenses and dispose of them as required.
7. Where appropriate use daily disposable lenses.
8. If the lens is dropped on an unclean surface, dispose of it immediately (if a daily disposable) or disinfect it for a minimum of 4 hours if a reusable lens.
9. Consult an eye care practitioner in case of any questions or uncertainty about your lens 'wear and care'.



Q4: Can patients still wear contact lenses if feeling unwell?

A: In the case of sickness, contact lens wearers should immediately switch to wearing glasses. This includes displaying symptoms of a suspected, or diagnosed, case of COVID-19. It also includes symptoms showing a deterioration in eye health, such as a red or pink eye.

It is important that patients have good eye vision every day, their contact lenses feel comfortable and the white of the eyes remains white. If one or more of these elements is missing, you should stop wearing your contact lenses and seek qualified eye care professional advice. The first consultation at this time should be done by phone, where your eye care professional will be able to guide you on how best to proceed. Follow the recommendations of the specialist as closely as possible.

Q5: A patient has been diagnosed with COVID-19. Can they continue to wear their contact lenses?

A: Patients who have been diagnosed with a viral respiratory infection like COVID-19 should stop wearing lenses immediately. This is because a bacterial infection might be developing at the same time as the immune system gets weaker.ⁱ This is a pre-condition for additional eye problems like microbial keratitis (a disease that left untreated can lead to blindness).

Q6: Would daily disposable lenses be safer to wear during this pandemic?

A: When talking about infection in general, daily disposable lenses seem to be safer, as they pose less risk of infection.ⁱⁱ There is still no evidence, however, that one type of contact lens is better than any other at this time.

Q7: Can the virus spread via discarded lenses?

A: Theoretically the lens is a surface, however it "swims" in tear film (which offers lots of natural antiviral protection).ⁱⁱⁱ To be on the safe side though, when discarding lenses, users should carefully disinfect them and wrap them in clean tissue.

Q8: Should people disinfect their glasses?

A: Patients should carefully wash their glasses with soap and water 3-4 times a day – this is particularly important during a pandemic. Special attention should be given to ‘emergency’ or reading spectacles. The latter require more careful handling in a pandemic as they aren’t worn on the face at all times. They should be properly stored and never left on dirty surfaces or unattended.



Q9: Do contact lens wearers touch their face more often than a noncontact lens wearer?

A: There is absolutely no data to suggest that contact lens wearers touch their eyes any more frequently than non-contact lens users. In fact, evidence actually demonstrates the opposite, as eye care professionals educate and encourage their patients to generally abstain from touching and rubbing their eyes.

Q10: What is your final piece of advice to patients, around the use of contact lenses and glasses at this time?

A: I would advise contact lens wearers to keep wearing their lenses if they have no systemic infectious disease, enjoying the benefits, convenience and freedom they offer, even during this pandemic. It is important though to strictly follow the instructions they have been given by their eye care professional on proper use and hygiene and ask for additional information if they need it!

I would just add that eye care practitioners all over the world, dedicate significant time to educate contact lens wearers on proper hygiene. As a result, it is probably the widest and most developed training programme in eye care^{iv} with many contact lens wearers having already developed healthy hygiene habits.



Author’s Biography

Prof. [Christina Nikolova Grupcheva](#) (MD, PhD, DSc, FEBO, FICO(Hon), FBCLA, FIACLE) is Head of the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Science & Specialised Eye Hospital at the Medical University of Varna Bulgaria. Currently she is the President of the European Board of Ophthalmology and holds leading positions in a number of learned international societies. Her clinical and research expertise relates to cornea, anterior segment, tear film, in vivo confocal microscopy, contact lenses and complex anterior segment surgery. Her work has been published in 190 peer reviewed publications.

Professor Grupcheva received payment from Johnson & Johnson for this interview.

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