



COVID-19 and Contact Lens Wear: What You Need To Know

GP Lens Institute

Contact lenses can be worn safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is evident that contact lens wear remains a highly effective form of vision correction for millions of people worldwide and, for many, the only viable path to functional vision. Certainly, it is understandable that individuals who depend on their contact lens correction to function visually in their everyday life are concerned about whether contact lenses should be worn during this time. However, there is no scientific evidence at this time indicating that wearing contact lenses increases the risk of contracting COVID-19.¹

The virus is primarily transmitted by being in close proximity to an affected individual who coughs or sneezes and inhaling the resulting droplets. As such, the importance of social distancing cannot be sufficiently emphasized.

The predominant ocular finding, occurring in between 3 – 30% of infected individuals, is conjunctivitis (i.e., “pink eye”)²⁻⁴. However, studies have found that there is very little evidence that COVID-19 is present in the tears, which indicates that while touching the eyes can represent a possible factor in transmission, but it is a fairly weak factor of transmission.^{2,5,6}

There are, however, several factors that are important in minimizing the risk of COVID-19 transmission while wearing contact lenses which have been recommended by numerous sources.^{1,7-11} These include the following:

- 1. The Importance of Proper Hand Washing.** Touching the eyes can represent a factor involved in COVID-19 transmission only if the hands were not washed thoroughly prior to handling the lenses. Prior to the current pandemic, it has been reported that poor hand hygiene is a risk factor in developing sight-threatening conditions such as microbial keratitis (i.e., “corneal ulcer”) and corneal inflammatory events in contact lens wearers.⁷ Therefore, eye care professionals have always emphasized that the hands should be washed thoroughly with soap and water for, at minimum, 20 seconds, and dried with an unused paper towel.
- 2. Proper Contact Lens Care.** Individuals wearing daily disposable lenses should discard their lenses after every use. Lenses that are worn on a two-week, monthly, or longer replacement schedule should be cleaned and disinfected as recommended by the prescribing eye care professional. Likewise, for individuals not disposing of their lenses daily, care solution bottles and storage cases should be discarded, at minimum, every month and good case hygiene should be performed. This includes emptying out old solution nightly, never topping off old solution with fresh solution, as well as cleaning and wiping the case dry every day.
- 3. Discontinue Contact Lens Wear if Ill.** As is consistent with other types of illness, anyone who feels ill with cold or flu-like symptoms should discontinue contact lens wear during this time period.

There is no scientific evidence to support that wearing spectacles provides protection against COVID-19 or other viral conditions.

COVID-19 and many other viruses can remain on hard surfaces for hours to days and can then be transferred to the spectacle wearers’ fingers and face. Therefore, it is also important for spectacle wearers to wash their hands prior to handling glasses or spectacles as well as cleaning and disinfecting their spectacles with soap and water after they have been worn. Likewise, it is

important to report that neither glasses nor contact lenses are approved for use as personal protective equipment (PPE). That said, contact lens wear – especially daily disposable lenses - may make the use of certain forms of PPE, including masks and non-prescription safety eyewear, more convenient and comfortable by providing a wider field of view and avoiding the fogging problems that have been reported with prescription spectacle wear.¹²

The bottom line is that healthy contact lens wearers can continue contact lens wear during this pandemic. It is important, however, to wear and care for the lenses as recommended by your eye care professional.

About the GPLI

The Gas Permeable Lens Institute (GPLI) is dedicated to providing eye care practitioners with educational resources to enable them to fully benefit from the many advantages of GP and custom specialty soft contact lenses. The work of the GPLI has grown to include an extensive school workshop program, monthly online webinars, and an array of educational and practice-building materials for practitioners – most of which are online (www.GPLI.info). The GPLI is an affiliate organization of the Contact Lens Manufacturers Association (CLMA).

Contact

GP Lens Institute

Edward S. Bennett, OD, MEd, FAAO, FSLs
President and Executive Director
Ebennett@UMSL.edu

Contact Lens Manufacturers Association

Kurtis Brown
President
johnkurtisbrown@gmail.com

References

1. Jones L, Walsh K, Willcox M, Morgan P, Nichols J. The COVID-19 pandemic: Important considerations for contact lens practitioners. *Contact Lens Ant Eye* doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clae.2020.03.012>
2. Wu P, Duan F, Luo C, et al. Characteristics of ocular findings of patients with Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Hubei Province, China. *JAMA Ophthalmol* Published online March 31, 2020. doi:10.1001/jamaophthalmol.2020.1291
3. J. Xia, J. Tong, M. Liu, Y. Shen, D. Guo, Evaluation of coronavirus in tears and conjunctival secretions of patients with SARS-CoV-2 infection, *J Med Virol* In press (2020). DOI: 10.1002/jmv.25725
4. W.J. Guan, Z.Y. Ni, Y. Hu, W.H. Liang, C.Q. Ou, J.X. He, et al., C. China medical treatment expert group for, clinical characteristics of coronavirus disease 2019 in China, *N Engl J Med* In press (2020). DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa2002032
5. Jun ISY, Anderson DE, Kang AEZ et al. Assessing viral shedding and infectivity of tears in Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) patients. *Ophthalmol* In Press. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ophtha.2020.03.026>
6. Jianhua X, Tong J, Liu M, et al. Evaluation of coronavirus in tears and conjunctival secretions of patients with SARS-CoV-2 infection. *J Medical Virology* Feb 26, 2020. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmv.25725>
7. Fonn D, Jones L. Hand hygiene is linked to microbial keratitis and corneal inflammatory events. *Contact Lens Anterior Eye* 2019;42(2):132-135.
8. Top contact lens experts dispel misinformation regarding Coronavirus/COVID-19 protections for contact lens wearers. Available at: <https://www.clspectrum.com/newsletters/contact-lenses-today/march-12,-2020>
9. Contact lens wear during COVID-19. Available at: <https://www.aoa.org/contact-lens-wear-during-covid-19>
10. Quinn T. Contact Lens Wear in the Time of Coronavirus. Available at: <https://youtu.be/BuZaAbtonKE>
11. Bennett ES. Weathering the COVID-19 storm. Available at: <https://www.clspectrum.com/issues/2020/march-2020/weather-the-covid-19-storm>
12. Reed MJ, Preventing fogging of spectacles whilst wearing a protective facemask. *J R Coll Surg Edinb* 2001;46(6):377.