

Dear Colleague

## Important Changes to the Scottish Diabetic Eye Screening Programme

This letter sets out a number of changes to strengthen and extend the Scottish Diabetic Eye Screening (DES) Programme (previously known as Diabetic Retinopathy Screening or DRS). The changes are based on decisions made by the Scottish Screening Committee (SSC) and take into account advice from the UK National Screening Committee (NSC). **The developments will be implemented from 1 January 2021.**

In summary, the changes are:

- **Revised screening intervals:** As recommended by the UK National Screening Committee, people with diabetes who are at low risk of sight loss will now be screened for diabetic retinopathy every two years, rather than every year.
- **Incorporation of OCT into the DES Programme:** Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) will be formally incorporated into the DES Programme and will normally be delivered by DES teams, instead of requiring referral to Ophthalmology.
- **Incorporation of a visual acuity threshold for OCT:** A Visual Acuity (VA) threshold will be introduced for OCT referral in order to ensure that patients are appropriately clinically prioritised

### 1. Action

**NHS Boards** will be responsible for implementing the changes in their local diabetic eye screening programmes, and for the staff training required to deliver these changes. Support from the National Services Division (NSD) and DES Collaborative will be available.

**Public Health Scotland** will ensure the required participant information material is updated to reflect the changes.

**From the Interim Chief Medical Officer**  
**Dr Gregor Smith**

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Date 4 December 2020

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For action

Board Chief Executives  
Board Medical Directors  
Board Directors of Public Health  
Board Screening Co-ordinators  
DRS Service Managers  
DRS Clinical Leads

For information

General Practitioners  
Practice Nurses

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**Further Enquiries to:**

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**Healthcare Improvement Scotland** will revise and review the clinical standards for the Diabetic Eye Screening (DES) Programme.

## **2. Background**

### **Revised screening intervals**

In 2016, the UK NSC recommended revised screening intervals (RSI) for patients within the DES programmes. They recommended that the interval between screening tests for patients with diabetes at low risk of sight loss should change from one year to two years. The current one-year (and in some cases, six monthly) interval should remain unchanged for those at higher risk of sight loss. Subsequently, the SSC approved the proposal made by National Services Division (NSD) to progress a business case for revised screening intervals for the DES Programme. Following the approval of the business case (which also covered OCT) by the Board Chief Executives Group, the Scottish Government (SG) commissioned NSD to oversee the introduction of the proposed change.

### **Incorporation of OCT into the DES Programme**

There is some variation in the current pathway for patients who are referred from the DES Programme to Ophthalmology services in NHS Boards.

The agreed business case (which also covered RSI) proposed that a surveillance cycle based on OCT should be introduced in order to reduce variation in patients' care. It was agreed that this would formally be incorporated into the auspices of the DES Programme, and implemented in parallel with the revised screening intervals.

### **Incorporation of a Visual Acuity threshold for OCT**

A proposal was submitted to the SSC through the new screening governance structure to introduce a VA threshold for OCT referral in order to ensure that the DES referral pathway aligns with the Scottish Medicine Consortium's guidance on treatment for macular oedema. The change will also ensure that patients are appropriately clinically prioritised. It was agreed that a VA threshold function should be introduced within the IT software with an initial setting which would be variable and could be switched on or off as required. This will mean that only patients with a VA that is either at or below the agreed threshold value will be referred for OCT.

## **Communication**

Information and guidance for healthcare professionals has been issued to all relevant stakeholders to support the changes outlined. In addition the resources are now available at [www.publichealthscotland.scot/DESchanges](http://www.publichealthscotland.scot/DESchanges).

## **3. Public Information**

Updated public information leaflets were made available to local DES programmes from the 24 November 2020. They should be issued by the local programmes to all screening participants who will be attending screening from 1 January 2021.

Any general questions in relation to distribution of this information should be directed to the Publications Team at Public Health Scotland [phs.generalpublications@phs.scot](mailto:phs.generalpublications@phs.scot).

NHS inform will be updated to reflect revised screening intervals, including specific information advising people when their next appointment will be: [www.nhsinform.scot/des](http://www.nhsinform.scot/des)  
There will also be specific information advising people of when their next appointment will be at [www.nhsinform.scot/mynextdes](http://www.nhsinform.scot/mynextdes)

The above links will be made live with updated content by Friday, 4 December 2020.

Yours sincerely

*Gregor Smith*

Dr Gregor Smith  
**Interim Chief Medical Officer**