



Wed, 21 June 2021

M DFA warns against deferring essential eye appointments: “Let’s see each other on the other side of lockdown.”

Macular Disease Foundation Australia (M DFA) is seeking to clear up any confusion around deferring eye appointments during lockdown, warning Australians to seek advice from their optometrist or ophthalmologist before doing so.

At the daily COVID-19 media conference yesterday, NSW Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant used eye checks as an example of something that could be deferred during lockdown, as long as you weren’t experiencing “pain or other issues”.

While eye pain **is** a sign of a medical emergency, pain is not the **only** indicator of whether you need to seek urgent medical help for an eye health emergency. Most serious visual loss occurs **without** pain.

“Any sudden changes in your vision – even without pain – could be an eye emergency. Deferring an eye appointment in those circumstances could cause irreversible vision loss,” said Associate Professor Alex Hunyor, Chair of M DFA’s Medical Committee.

“Many urgent, sight-threatening conditions – including wet age-related macular degeneration (AMD), diabetic macular oedema (DMO) and retinal detachment – aren’t painful,” A/Prof Hunyor explained.

“Similarly, if you are already receiving essential eye injections or laser treatment for wet AMD, DMO or treatment for any other eye condition, I strongly urge you to keep your scheduled appointment.”

“Australia is facing an increase in the number of people who could unnecessarily lose their sight due to treatment cancellations caused by fear and confusion around COVID-19,” A/Prof Hunyor added.

One in seven Australians over the age of 50 have signs of AMD, and the incidence increases with age. DMO is a complication of diabetic retinopathy, the most common cause of vision loss in working-age Australians. Everyone with diabetes is at risk.

M DFA CEO Dee Hopkins said at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, there was a worrying increase in the number of people cancelling essential appointments, in particular eye injection appointments.

“M DFA rolled out a national campaign, featuring M DFA’s Patron Ita Buttrose AC OBE, to counter this trend last year. The anecdotal evidence is that people are once again cancelling sight-saving appointments as several states battle the virulent Delta strain.

“At one busy Sydney clinic on Monday, only 23 of 43 scheduled patients attended for their eye injections. If this is a barometer of what is happening more broadly, the implications are quite concerning,” Ms Hopkins said.

“If you require injections for wet AMD or DMO or other macular conditions, it is essential that you attend your specialist appointment or discuss your treatment options with your ophthalmologist. Dr Chant is correct in saying that some eye checks, such as for glasses, can be safely deferred. However, if anyone experiences sudden changes or loss of vision, they should immediately call their optometrist for urgent advice. Specialist eye treatments need to continue as scheduled as they are considered to be medically essential.”

National Helpline: 1800 111 709 www.mdfoundation.com.au

Are you at risk? Take the quiz at www.CheckMyMacula.com.au

“Call ahead. Ask what extra protocols are in place, and what precautions you can take,” Ms Hopkins said.

“I want to stress: if you have a scheduled eye treatment, if you are a family carer, or someone who needs to take a person to a scheduled appointment, you are **not** breaching public health measures to attend that appointment.

“Obviously, if individuals have symptoms of the virus or have had contact with someone who has been infected, they should phone for medical advice, rather than leaving their home.

“We urge all Australians to take care of their eye health and seek medical advice before deferring scheduled appointments during lockdowns. The last thing we need is to emerge from this pandemic with another health crisis of people who are blind or have severe vision loss as a result of not treating essential eye conditions.”

“We understand people are fearful but, please, call and speak with your eye health professional, or the receptionist. You can also call MDFA’s National Helpline – 1800 111 709 – for free telephone advice and a free Amsler grid, which is a useful tool for monitoring vision changes at home,” Ms Hopkins said.

-ENDS-

ABOUT MACULAR DISEASE FOUNDATION AUSTRALIA (MDFA)

MDFA is the peak national body representing the voice of the macular disease community. It is committed to reducing the incidence and impact of macular disease, the leading cause of blindness and severe vision loss in Australia. It provides a range of information and support services via its **National Helpline 1800 111 709**. The National Helpline remains open and is staffed remotely.

ABOUT MACULAR DISEASE

Macular disease covers a range of painless conditions that affect the central retina (the macula) at the back of the eye. The most common are age-related macular degeneration (AMD), and diabetic retinopathy (DR), including diabetic macular oedema (DMO). AMD accounts for 50% of blindness in Australia. One in seven (approximately 1.4 million) Australians over the age of 50 have some evidence of AMD

ABOUT WET (NEOVASCULAR) AMD

Wet (neovascular) AMD is the most aggressive form of AMD and central vision changes are often sudden and severe. Wet AMD often leads to a rapid loss of central vision. While there is no cure for AMD, there is highly effective medical treatment available for wet AMD. Standard treatment involves an injection of anti-VEGF medication into the eye (intravitreal injection). For most people, treatment usually begins with injections at monthly intervals. Depending on the response, the interval between injections may be extended. For most patients, ongoing or indefinite treatment is required.

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Steven McArthur | Buzz Group | Director

E: steven@buzzgroup.com.au | **M:** +61 412 457 471

Natasha Rontziokos | Buzz Group | Communications Lead

E: natasha@buzzgroup.com.au | **M:** +61 421 272 390

National Helpline: 1800 111 709 www.mdfoundation.com.au

Are you at risk? Take the quiz at www.CheckMyMacula.com.au