

Children and eye examinations: What's happening out there and how can we help?

Q&A responses by Dr Chris Davey, Bradford University

- 1 A lot of parents still think that schools do full school sight tests at school when in my area Scarborough, North Yorkshire they do not. I think that Dispensing Opticians and Optometrists should do drop in at primary schools to let parents and children understand what services are available
Agreed; some outreach work with schools would be a great idea.
- 2 Are parents aware the eye test is free and also chain practices offer free specs.
I don't know! A qualitative study looking into this would be good.
- 3 Can we volunteer to help with local school screening as DO's?
If you live in an area without school screening this may be welcomed by schools on an individual basis; it probably depends on the head teacher.
- 4 Do you think the parents of the children in the most deprived areas aren't coming for Sight Tests because they are concerned about other things like bills etc? Or because their children aren't presenting symptoms like the least deprived? Is there any research about why?
Probably both; I mentioned a study by Bruce et al (2018) that found some common themes. There has also been 2 paper published by Shickle et al in 2014 that looked at similar reason for adults; they're open access if you'd like a read.
- 5 Does the NHS prefer children's sight tests to be every two years now-rather than one
Depending on age and risk factors then 2 years would be OK for some children.
- 6 Do you think that the NHS will ever cover the cost for thinner lenses for children with higher prescriptions, this could be a major factor in why children don't like/want to wear spectacles
I agree that the GOS fees are probably not fit for purpose, although voucher values do increase when the prescription gets above certain powers.
- 7 Do you think myopia control spectacle lenses will ever be covered on the NHS?
In the current financial climate I think it's unlikely. There would have to be a very strong cost-benefit case.
- 8 Is there any movement on allowing vouchers to be claimed for more things? For instance we can't claim a voucher for Precision tinting for children with visual stress nor for myopia control lenses also for kids that need full time glasses Rx sunglasses do not qualify for a voucher.
My apologies; I'm not an expert on NHS policy and decision making.
- 9 Would it be feasible for the NHS to fund two pairs of specs via GOS3 for kids maybe under 8 / 10 years old.? Hospitals have the flexibility to do this, could this be extended to the high street?
The 'Glasses in Classes' study was hoping to show the benefit of doing this. If it was shown to be educationally beneficial the second pair was more likely to be funded by DfE rather than the NHS, but sadly the study was affected by the COVID lockdown.
- 10 More of a statement.... some opticians for operational and perhaps commercial reasons consciously limit the number of kids appointments as they are not seen as particularly lucrative. Could the NHS consider a higher fee for kids ? maybe double the fee to take in a return appointment for cyclo?
Agreed; the GOS financial model is contrary to public health. It does not promote high uptake.

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- 11 Could the uptake of children having eye examinations be related to the dispensing of spectacles? Patients are prescribed spectacles, parents take children 'elsewhere' to look for frames, which aren't covered by the GOS3, and then get lost without having spectacles dispensed and do not return to practice
I'm not sure; it would be interesting to look at the proportion of children who are prescribed but not dispensed.
- 12 Interesting thought. Do we need a myopia screening aimed at 6-7 year olds a year later than the screening?
Exactly! Perhaps we do! We have a PhD student looking into this.
- 13 We have a lot of children who have been tested and recommended to wear glasses full time especially boys who refuse to wear them what is the best way to get them to comply?
Try to find out why they won't wear them; different children may have different barriers. Can their teacher help? Are they happy just wearing them in class? Can it be tied to a visual task they enjoy; eg. Gaming or TV?
- 14 In one of the slides it showed the increase post lockdown of higher rates of refraction. Do you think there's a direct correlation between increased screen time and increase in refraction? I practice in an affluent market town and anecdotally I find that the high majority of kids have tablet/iPad access and they all seem to have increasing prescriptions. Are there any studies to establish the possible links?
That slide showed higher rates of bilateral distance vision screening fails. Yes there have been studies showing links, although it's not my area of expertise.
- 15 How do the screenings stats compare in Wales to England?
I don't know, but I'd like to know!
- 16 Is there any research been done in Scotland? and how does the system differ?
Same as Q18
- 17 Is there any research done on children who have only private eye examinations ?
No! We have no idea about what goes on with private tests of any age groups. We don't even know how many private tests are done. Now that electronic patient records are widespread it would be good if there was an anonymous collaborative database that amalgamates national sight tests data so we would be able to answer public eye health questions like this.