

Children's Ophthalmology

Children's eye care service

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

The children's ophthalmology staff are here to help children who are referred for:

- reduced vision
- squint (strabismus)
- lazy eye or reduced vision (amblyopia)
- glasses prescriptions
- other eye problems.

Referrals may come from local opticians, GPs, school nurses and health visitors.

Why test children's eyes?

Children's eyes develop from the age of 0 to 8 years. We aim to maximise their vision before it has settled into maturity and can no longer be helped.

We want to improve their opportunities throughout life, from achieving at school, learning to drive, and having a wide choice of employment opportunities open to them.

Children often do not know what 'good vision' looks like. And so, they do not tell their carers they have a problem seeing things. The range of tests developed to test children's eyes will help us find out if there are any problems.

What are the common eye problems in children?

- about 4 in every 100 children (4 per cent) have a squint (strabismus). This is where an eye turns in or out
- 8 in every 100 children (8 per cent) under 8 years old need glasses
- children with conditions like diabetes and arthritis also need hospital appointments to monitor their eye health

Where is the children's eye department?

The children's ophthalmology clinic is inside the children's outpatient department. This is on the 6th floor of the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother building at St Mary's Hospital.

How to find St Mary's Hospital: www.imperial.nhs.uk/our-locations/st-marys-hospital

What should I remember for my child's appointment?

Please:

- bring some sunglasses for your child, particularly if it is bright weather. This is because they may need eye drops that will make their eyes sensitive to light
- make sure you reassure or praise your child as they see each clinician
- try to find out information about other family members who have eye conditions. This will help us in diagnosing any inherited sight problems

What happens on the day of my child's appointment?

1. You will check in at reception.
2. A nurse will direct you to the waiting area for your first specialist clinician.
3. Toilets and baby changing facilities are opposite reception.
4. Your child will be seen by the orthoptist to assess the vision and alignment of their eyes. Following this, drops may be given. You will be asked to wait in the waiting area for the drops to take effect.
5. Your child may be seen by the optometrist or doctor, or both.

How long will my child's appointment take?

Please allow up to 3 hours for the appointment, because:

- your child may need to see more than one clinician
- your child may need to have eye drops, which need time to work

So, be prepared to wait. Plan your transport or parking before you come to the clinic. Bring snacks and drinks you might need.

You may also want to bring books or toys, or entertainment with headphones.

Who will my child see?

Your child will see a range of medical staff to ensure we have carried out a thorough investigation into your child's eye health. They may see 1 or more of the following clinicians:

- **orthoptist** – an eye clinician who assesses the level of vision, the alignment of the eyes (possible squint) and the '3D vision'. The orthoptist may prescribe a course of patching of one eye to improve the vision of the unpatched eye, due to a 'lazy eye' (amblyopia).

The orthoptist may also put drops into your child's eye to enlarge (dilate) the dark part of the eye (pupil). Be aware that the drops:

- can take up to 1 hour to act
 - may take up to 24 hours to fully wear off
 - cause blurred close-up (near) vision
 - cause light sensitivity
- **children's optometrist** – this is a clinician experienced in prescribing children's glasses and checking the health of the inside of the eyes.

The optometrist will issue a prescription and a voucher for one pair of glasses, if needed. This can be used at any optician. Make sure the practice has a good range of children's frames.

- **children's ophthalmologist** – a doctor specialising in children's eye health and complex eye problems which may need treatment or surgery, or both.

The ophthalmologist can also register and issue a certificate for children with visual impairment (CVI form). This can help raise awareness of their condition in school and other places.

Will we need to visit the hospital again?

You will be told the outcome of your first appointment by the last clinician your child sees on the day. They will advise on any follow-up appointments needed.

- you will be sent a letter with the details of the next appointment
- you may also get a text message confirmation
- please check we have your contact details correct before you leave the department
- the time between appointments will depend on your child's eye condition and treatment plan

If your child needs to have specific diagnostic tests, you may have an appointment at the Western Eye Hospital.

Who can I contact for more information?

St Mary's Hospital

Children's outpatients: Call 020 3312 7683 (08.30 – 16.30 Monday to Friday, except public holidays).

Western Eye Hospital

Orthoptic department: Call 020 3312 3256 (08.30 – 16.30 Monday to Friday, except public holidays).

Ophthalmic emergency department: Call 020 3312 3247 (08:00 – 22:00 Monday to Friday)

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service, and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any suggestions or comments about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (PALS) on 020 3312 7777 (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk