

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Intraocular Lens Policy Change

Ministry of Health

Last Updated: April 17, 2012

1. What is changing for people who need cataract surgery?

- After discussing with physicians, ophthalmologists and patients, the province has decided to make foldable monofocal lenses the insured standard of care for cataract surgeries.
- Before this decision, rigid monofocal lenses were the insured standard of care.
- This means patients will no longer have to pay for foldable monofocal lens – these will be fully covered. Rigid monofocal lenses will continue to be fully covered.
- Patients who wish to have a specialty lens implanted, to do more than just correct the cataract, will now buy these from the health authority, not from the surgeon, at a reduced cost.
- Health authorities will take over purchasing and distributing all lenses used in cataract surgeries (i.e., both monofocal and specialty lenses).
- Suppliers, surgeons and health authorities will have until June 4, 2012 to adapt to the new purchasing and supply model.

2. What is a lens, anyway, and why is it needed in cataract surgery?

- Cataract surgery involves removing the cloudy lens from the eye and replacing it with a clear plastic lens to restore vision. These plastic lenses are called intraocular lenses.
- There are two basic types of intraocular lenses: rigid and foldable. Rigid are an older version of the lens; foldable lenses are more updated technology.
- The most commonly used type of lens is monofocal, which is similar to the natural eye lens. However, multifocal lenses exist which correct not only cataracts, but also correct certain eye conditions.

3. When is this change happening?

- Beginning June 4, 2012, foldable monofocal lenses will be offered free of charge to all BC residents requiring cataract surgery.

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4. Why are you now insuring monofocal foldable lenses, when they weren't covered for so long?

- The ministry's previous position was based on a review of the scientific evidence and literature, which suggested no significant patient benefits from foldable lenses.
- However, in discussions with surgeons, the ministry discovered that surgeons see short-term benefits to patients using foldable lenses.
- We recognize monofocal foldable lenses are the preferred lens used by most ophthalmologists. About 95 per cent of lenses being used are foldable.
- Out of all this discussion and study, the ministry decided to make this change.

5. Between now and June 4, will patients have to pay if they want a foldable lens?

- Yes, until the new policy comes into effect, patients will continue to purchase foldable lenses from their surgeon.
- Patients scheduled for cataract surgery before June 4 may wish to discuss these changes with their physicians, as the ministry will not reimburse patients who have their surgery before the change.

6. What about specialty lenses (multifocal, etc.)? Are you going to insure those now?

- No, only the monofocal foldable lens will be funded.
- Specialty lenses are not **required** for cataract surgery. They are normally used to correct vision in order to replace the need for eyeglasses.

7. What happens if patients choose a non-insured specialty lens, after June 4? How much will they have to pay?

- If a specialty lens is chosen by a patient, the patient will be required to pay the cost difference between the insured monofocal lens and the specialty lens.
- Charges to patients will be less than in the past. Why?:
 - Bulk-purchasing will reduce the prices of all lenses;
 - Health authorities will provide all lenses on a cost-recovery basis only (they will not make any profit);
 - The patient is NOT paying the full cost of the specialty lens, but only the cost difference between the standard lens and the specialty one.
- This means that patients will pay the very lowest amount possible.
- The amount will depend on the specific type of lens chosen.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

8. How many patients were paying for lenses before this change? How many will be paying for lenses now?

- Ophthalmologists use foldable lenses in about 95 per cent of surgeries now – this means that 95% of patients were paying for a lens when the rigid lens was the insured standard of care.
- As of June 4, we expect about 80 per cent of surgeries will be done with monofocal foldable lenses, and therefore these patients will not pay anything. The other 20 per cent will be done with specialty lenses, and patients will be charged for these lenses.

9. Why are the health authorities taking over purchasing of all cataract lenses?

- Previously, all ophthalmologists/physicians purchased lenses on behalf of their patients.
- On June 4, health authorities will take over purchasing and distributing all lenses used in cataract surgeries (both monofocal and specialty lenses).
- When physicians were selling lenses to patients, there was a wide variation in the price charged to patients. When health authorities take over this function, patients will pay the same amount for lenses, regardless of where they live or who their surgeon is. This is fairer for patients.
- Since health authorities will provide uninsured lenses without making a profit on the sale, patients will pay less for these products; as many people getting cataract surgery are seniors on fixed incomes, this is very important.
- Health authorities will also be able to get better pricing on lenses from the manufacturers, through bulk purchasing. This means that taxpayers are getting the best value for their money.
- Having all lenses managed through health authority supply chains improves patient safety. If there are product recalls or other issues in the future, the health authorities will be able to quickly manage the issue.

10. Will you reimburse patients who have paid for these lenses in the past? Will you reimburse patients who will pay between now and June 4?

- No, these changes will only be affecting patients in the future — starting June 4, 2012.

11. How many people get cataract surgery in B.C. each year?

- About 50,000 British Columbians have cataract surgery each year, mostly seniors.

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12. How much money will this change save the system and patients?

- This change is not about saving the health system money, but rather about recognizing the current standard of care for cataract surgery.
- It will save most patients money, even if they choose a specialty lens, since monofocal lenses will now be provided free of charge to patients, and since central purchasing will lower prices of speciality lenses if patients choose them.

13. Have physicians been making money off selling lenses in the past?

- We don't know how much revenue foldable lenses have generated for physicians in the past, as doctor's offices are private businesses. As such, we do not have access to their financial information.

14. Will there be any charges to patients for the cataract surgery procedure?

- Cataract surgery is a benefit of MSP.
- Consultations, visits and testing related to MSP-insured cataract surgery include any assessments required for the implantation of foldable monofocal or rigid monofocal lenses.
- Also, a review of all lens options is considered included in any consultation performed prior to cataract surgery. Patients should not be directly billed for any of these services.
- If patient chooses a specialty (uninsured) lens, there may be additional fees from the doctor, if testing, beyond what is needed for all cataract patients, is required. The amounts are set by the physicians themselves, so patients should ensure they are aware of all costs before they choose a specialty lens.

15. How much do monofocal lenses cost? How much will I actually have to pay for multifocal lenses if I choose to have them?

- We understand that currently monofocal rigid lenses are purchased for about \$30; a monofocal foldable lens currently costs between \$250 and \$500.
- Health Shared Services BC will work with lens suppliers to ensure patients have access to the best quality products at the best prices; however, as negotiations on long-term supplier contracts are still underway, we do not know exactly how much the bulk purchased monofocal lenses will cost.
- For this same reason, we cannot currently estimate how much specialty lenses will cost, given that the price patients pay will be based on the difference between the cost of the standard monofocal foldable lens. However, we understand that some multifocal lenses can cost upwards of \$1,000.

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16. Why do I have to sign a consent form?

- It is important that all patients understand they are able to get their cataract surgery with no out-of-pocket costs; the consent form ensures that patients know the options available to them.
- For those who choose a specialty lens, signing the form shows that they understand why they are paying, and exactly what the cost will be.

17. What about patients who paid for foldable lenses in the past because their doctors did not make them aware of the insured option (i.e., rigid monofocal lenses prior to June 4)? What recourse do they have?

- If patients are concerned about this they should raise the issue with their surgeon.
- Patients are also able to bring concerns to the Patient Care Quality Office in their health authority. For contact information, patients should call their regional health authority.