



South African Optometric Association

## **SAOA STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA'S ANNOUNCEMENT TO EXTEND THE LOCKDOWN PERIOD FOR A FURTHER TWO WEEKS.**

**The SAOA's priority is to ensure the health and safety of the optometric community and public. It is thus the view of the SAOA that optometric practices should remain closed as far as possible, for the duration of the now extended lock down period and restrict their services to urgent and emergent cases in accordance with guidelines stipulated below.**

Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians are health professionals, registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). As such, optometrists and dispensing opticians are not obliged to apply for any special permits to travel to and from practices when deemed necessary, at the discretion of practitioners, other than have their HPCSA cards on their person. For those who do not have their HPCSA cards, the SAOA will provide a supportive letter on a SAOA letterhead, on request.

It is to be noted, however, that the position of the SAOA, in response to an extended lockdown period, is within the context of a declared national disaster and in the face of the threat of a highly infectious, lethal and treacherous virus that is claiming the lives of thousands of unsuspecting victims, globally and locally. The appeal to stay at home is in support of the principle to 'flatten the curve' and minimise exposure of members, staff, patients and their families, primarily to preserve the lives of our members and all who come into contact with them.

For those who see the need to open doors for an allocated period of time, based on professional judgement, taking cognisance of the needs of patients, safety guidelines are attached for strict consideration.

**As frontline (primary) health professionals, with ethical obligations to patients, Optometrists should use their professional discretion to determine the necessity, need and timing of eye care, including assessing patient expressed urgency. In this regard, the following is recommended:**

- Practices should be closed for the duration of the lock down period and Open on and for emergency cases as assessed by Optometrist.
- All non- essential care (non-urgent and non-emergent) be rescheduled until after the lock down period. To view urgent and emergent situation list [click here](#).
- When attending to patients, strict safety guidelines must be adhered to. To view safety measures in practice [click here](#).
- The necessity for a consultation should be assessed each time.
- Contact details are to be readily available to patients on voice mail, websites, social media platforms, SMS and clearly displayed at practices.
- Practitioners may assist and/or advise patients telephonically based on the principles of tele-health and may charge for such consultations, using the SAOA code. To view the guidelines [click here](#).

- **Print your HPCSA card and keep it with your person at all times, especially when travelling.**
- **If there is No HPCSA card, please contact the office for travel letter.**

The SAOA Board is in the process of engaging banks, Tenants Association, major Landlords, UIF, Small Business Department, HPCSA, NDOH and other key stakeholders to present comprehensive mitigating factors and solution based proposals to assist members with rentals, loans repayments, employees' salaries, Government packages support, Tele-health, Optometry support at hospital levels etc.

Should members have any queries, please contact Harry Rosen on 084 482 4517 or Lucky Nkosi on 074 243 4261 at any time.

Stay Safe

Best Regards,

SAOA TEAM