

Information For Patients Requesting Chloroquine or Hydroxychloroquine Retinal Monitoring

Chloroquine and Hydroxychloroquine are medical drugs derived from another drug called Quinine. The drugs are used for a variety of purposes and this leaflet will use the abbreviation 'HCQ' to refer collectively to this group of drugs. In some people, HCQ can be harmful to the retina (the light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye). The damage to the retina is referred to as retinopathy. The risk of HCQ retinopathy depends on several factors including the drug, dose, and duration of treatment, along with the presence of any kidney impairment and the use of certain other medications. It is likely that this is the reason that you have been advised to attend for an eye test by the hospital consultant or GP who has prescribed this treatment.

NHS England (the lead body for the NHS in England) now recommends annual monitoring of patients using HCQ starting after 5 years of therapy, or earlier for patients at higher risk (1). The series of tests recommended by NHS England for HCQ-retinopathy monitoring is that recommended by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists (2) and includes tests not used in any routine eye test and therefore not available at this practice.

The responsibility for any HCQ monitoring service lies with the commissioners of the health service that requires the prescription of HCQ and the prescriber of the medicine (1,2). In common with much the UK, the Norfolk and Waveney area does not yet have a formal monitoring programme for HCQ retinopathy. Furthermore, NHS England has stated that; *'standard community optometrist review does not meet the Royal College of Ophthalmologists' recommendations and risks false reassurance.'* (1).

As part of a routine eye test, your vision and the health of your eyes will be assessed. In the event of any abnormal findings, these will be discussed with you, and you may be referred on for further investigation. We must stress however, that the measurements and examinations within an eye test fall short of the full monitoring procedure recommended by NHS England.

If your eye test is to be free under the NHS, then you must be in an eligible group (our staff can advise you as to who is eligible for an NHS sight test and how often). For those not eligible for an NHS eye test, a fee will apply.

Our advice in conjunction with the Norfolk and Waveney Local Optical Committee (an organisation which represents optical professionals in the area) would be for you to attend for your routine eye examination when you receive your normal reminder or sooner if you are having problems with your vision.

The local Rheumatology/Dermatology departments and GPs are aware of the issues surrounding HCQ monitoring, but it may be wise for you to take this letter with you to your next appointment with them. They should be able to update you of any developments in respect of HCQ monitoring in your area.

IMPORTANT: Do NOT stop or alter your medication without prior discussion with your prescribing doctor.

References

1. 'Hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine retinopathy monitoring.' Regional Medicines Optimisation Committee. NHS England July 2022 [www.england.nhs.uk/publication/hydroxychloroquine-and-chloroquine-retinopathy-monitoring/]
2. 'Hydroxychloroquine and Chloroquine Retinopathy: Recommendations on Monitoring'. Royal College of Ophthalmologists. December 2020 [www.rcophth.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Hydroxychloroquine-and-Chloroquine-Retinopathy-Monitoring-Executive-Summary.pdf]
3. 'CCEHC statement on responsibilities for a Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) monitoring pathway'. Clinical Council for Eye Health Commissioning February 2020 [www.college-optometrists.org/news/2020/march/ccehc-statement-on-responsibilities-for-a-hydroxyc]

Further information

Who is eligible for a free NHS eye test	www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/opticians/free-nhs-eye-tests-and-optical-vouchers/
How often you can have a free NHS eye test if you are eligible	www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/opticians/how-often-can-i-have-a-free-nhs-eye-test/
'Eye monitoring for patients taking hydroxychloroquine' a leaflet produced by the Macular Society	www.macularsociety.org/media/kcclmdko/hydroxychloroquine-ms040-2021.pdf

This leaflet has been produced by the Norfolk & Norwich Local Optical Committee, an organisation that represents local optical professionals.

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