

Special Bulletin

For professional providers

November 20, 2024

National Diabetes Awareness Month: Promoting Annual Vision Exams

Diabetes is a devastating disease. In 2021, it was not only responsible for the deaths of more than 100,000 Americans, but it also was a contributing cause to another nearly 400,000 deaths. In addition, for the 38.4 million Americans living with diabetes¹, the chronic disease can result in numerous, debilitating complications, including blindness.

Fortunately, an annual eye exam enables ophthalmologists and optometrists to detect the early signs of diabetes retinal disease (DRD), which is often asymptomatic until the later stages of diabetes.

A recent study by the American Academy of Ophthalmology² indicated that 9.6 million Americans have diabetic retinopathy and 1.8 million (5%) of Americans have vision-threatening microvascular complications.

1. Promoting Annual Vision Exams

National Diabetes Awareness Month, which occurs every November, is an excellent time to encourage patients to schedule their annual eye appointment by the end of this year or early next year. Maintaining regular eye exams is critical for detecting DRD early and protecting eyesight.

The American Diabetes Association guidelines for eye exams are as follows:

- **Adult type 1 diabetes** – initial dilated eye exam within five years of diabetes diagnosis, annually thereafter.
- **Adult type 2 diabetes** – initial dilated eye exam as soon as possible after diabetes diagnosis.

2. Closing HEDIS® Gaps

To ensure compliance and quality improvement, Highmark evaluates performance of the EED (Eye Exam for Patients with Diabetes) measure through HEDIS, which is supported and maintained by the NCQA (National Committee for Quality Assurance). This is crucial for the early detection and management of diabetic retinopathy. The EED measure assesses the percentage of members 18-75 years of age with diabetes (type 1 or 2) who had a retinal exam, which includes:

- A *negative* retinal or dilated eye exam by an optometrist or ophthalmologist during the measurement year or year prior
- A *positive* retinal or dilated eye exam by an optometrist or ophthalmologist during the measurement year

The following CPT II codes will meet measure compliance and close the member’s gap:

- **2022F, 2024F, 2026F**: For a diabetic retinal screening **with** evidence of diabetic retinopathy
- **2023F, 2025F, 2033F**: For a diabetic retinal screening **without** evidence of diabetic retinopathy

If no evidence of DRD and glycemia, a well-controlled screening every one-to-two years may be considered. If existing DRD is progressing or sight-threatening, exams will be needed more frequently.

A key element of a diabetes-related eye examination is the patient’s history, which includes the duration of the disease, current medications and glycemic levels.

Effective team care and ongoing communication can decrease the risk of DRD, reduce systemic complications, improve clinical outcomes, and enhance quality of life for your patients with diabetes.

References

¹[Statistics About Diabetes | ADA](#)

²[Diabetic Retinopathy: Screening, Treatment, and Trends - American Academy of Ophthalmology](#)

Additional Resources

[Diabetic Eye Disease Resources | National Eye Institute](#)

[What Can You Do to Protect Your Eyes? | American Diabetes Association](#)

[Diabetic Retinopathy: A Position Statement by the American Diabetes Association | Diabetes Care | American Diabetes Association](#)

[Promoting Eye Health | Diabetes | CDC](#)

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