



**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**

BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY  
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IN REPLY REFER TO  
10 Jun 08

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDER, NAVY MEDICINE EAST  
COMMANDER, NAVY MEDICINE WEST  
COMMANDER, NAVY MEDICINE NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA  
COMMANDER, NAVY MEDICINE SUPPORT COMMAND

SUBJECT: Policy for Deployment Following Refractive Eye Surgery

Reference: (a) CNO Washington DC 212221Z Dec 99 (NAVADMIN 341/99) Photorefractive Keratectomy Surgery Program for Active Duty Service Members  
(b) NAVMED P-117, Manual of Medical Department  
(c) BUMED Washington DC 061344Z Apr 00 Corneal Refractive Surgery Physical Standards and Waiver  
(d) NAVMED Policy 07-001 Policy Guidance on LASIK (Laser in-situ Keratomileusis) of 25 Oct 06

This memorandum establishes specific policies regarding deployment of service members who have had refractive eye surgery, and assist commands in managing their deployable assets. Medical Treatment Faculties are directed to use the following guidelines while ensuring the best clinical outcome following surgery to protect service members from visual complications in an operational environment that would negatively impact the mission.

- **Post-Laser Refractive Surgery Recovery Time:** A Sailor who has had laser refractive surgery must have a satisfactory period for post-surgical recovery before deployment. In the weeks that follow laser refractive surgery, an ophthalmologist or optometrist provides continued post-surgical care and determines when each service member's recovery is complete to include meeting vision readiness standards for deployment. As with any surgery, there is a large degree of patient variability which prevents establishing a set time frame for full recovery. Post-surgical time estimates are provided below.

**Photorefractive Keratectomy (PRK):** PRK is common refractive surgery performed in the military. This procedure abrades the surface of the eye prior to applying laser energy and does not involve creating a flap of tissue. Typically, a service member is non-deployable 3 months following uncomplicated PRK. The managing eye care provider may clear patients earlier or later than this time frame, depending on the course of the post-surgical recovery. Related "surface ablation" procedures that are considered equivalent to PRK include Laser Epithelial Keratomileusis (LASEK) and Epithelial Laser in-situ Keratomileusis (epi-LASIK).

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- **LASIK:** The LASIK procedure creates a flap of ocular surface tissue prior to applying laser energy. Uncomplicated LASIK patients are typically non-deployable for at least 1 month following surgery. This time frame is also an estimate, and the managing eye care provider may clear a Sailor or Marine earlier or later depending on the outcome.
- **Phakic intraocular lens (Phakic IOL):** The phakic IOL, also called an implantable collamer lens (ICL) is a newer surgical procedure that involves implanting a lens over the existing natural lens of the eye. The benefits of this procedure are less reliance of spectacles and/or contact lenses in Sailors or Marines for which PRK or LASIK may be contraindicated (as in cases where the cornea is too thin or irregular to allow corneal refractive surgery to be conducted safely). Typically, patients recover very quickly following the ICL procedure and should remain non-deployable for at least 1 month following surgery. This time frame is also an estimate and can be modified by the managing eye care provider on a case-by-case basis.

The point of contact regarding this policy is CAPT Joe McBreen, MC, USN. He may be reached at 202-762-3014 or via e-mail at [joseph.mcbreen@med.navy.mil](mailto:joseph.mcbreen@med.navy.mil).

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