

August: Children's Eye Health



It's back-to-school time and you're prepared with your child's enrollment forms, orientation schedules, and immunizations--but what about their eyes? When it comes to thinking about children's health, eye injuries and vision impairments are probably not among the first ailments that come to mind. August was declared Vision & Learning Month in 1995. The goal of this national observance is to help educate parents and educators about the critical link between vision and learning. This has become a great signal for parents to get your child's eyes checked before school starts.

Most children have healthy eyes. But there are conditions that can threaten good vision. Because you can't always "look" into your child's eyes to tell if they have eye health problems, set up some time today for an eye exam.

Nearly 25 percent of school-aged children have vision problems. Of children ages 3 to 5, close to one in 20 has a problem that could result in permanent vision loss if left untreated. The American Academy of Ophthalmology estimates that 80 percent of preschoolers do not receive vision screenings. Additionally, thousands of children age 5 and under suffer eye injuries each year at home, in the car and at play. Eye injuries affect older children as well, accounting for a majority of the 42,000 annual sports-related eye injuries.

When vision problems go undetected, children almost invariably have trouble reading and doing their schoolwork. They often display fatigue, fidgeting, and frustrations in the classroom—traits that can lead to a misdiagnosis of dyslexia or other learning disabilities. - American Optometric Association. "It is estimated that 80% of children with a learning disability have an undiagnosed vision problem." - Vision Council of America.

Early diagnosis and treatment of children's vision problems is a necessary component to school readiness and academic learning; and that vision screening is not a substitute for a complete eye and vision evaluation by an eye doctor. Comprehensive eye and vision examinations are important for all children first entering school and regularly throughout their school-aged years to ensure healthy eyes and adequate visual skills essential for successful academic achievement.- National PTA Policy Statement 2005, Elements of Comprehensive Health Programs

Your child's eyes should be examined during regular pediatric appointments, and vision testing should be conducted around age 3. Appropriate eye care is essential for maintaining good vision. Most eye problems in children can be corrected if they are

detected and treated early. However, many problems can result in permanent vision loss if left untreated. The most common types of eye problems seen in children are:

- Myopia (nearsightedness)
- Strabismus (crossed eyes)
- Amblyopia (lazy eye)

Some of the signs your child might be experiencing impaired vision:

- Wandering or crossed eyes
- Blurred or double vision
- Headaches or pain in the eyes
- Difficulty copying from board at school
- Holding books close to read or sitting close to the TV
- Squinting
- Sensitivity to light
- Burning, itching, watery eyes, or inexplicable redness in the eyes

To minimize the risk of eye injuries, young children should only have access to age-appropriate toys devoid of sharp or protruding parts or that can fire projectiles. Older children with glasses should wear polycarbonate lenses when playing sports.

Children should also have access to sunglasses and be taught the importance of limiting exposure to UV rays, as they are more susceptible to UV damage than adults. One of the best ways to ensure your child keeps his/her good vision throughout life is to set a good health example.

