

# News Release

## Ophthalmologists Urge Parents to be EyeSmart this Back-to-School Season

*American Academy of Ophthalmology Warns of the Dangers of Neglecting Kids' Eye Health*

Orlando, Florida Sept 9<sup>th</sup> 2013 – As kids head back to school this fall, ophthalmologists are reminding parents about the importance of maintaining healthy vision in helping achieve educational success. Whether children are reading books, viewing whiteboards, using iPads or playing sports, ensuring their eyes are functioning and growing normally is key to their development and overall well-being.

The vision system is not fully formed in babies and young children, therefore early detection of treatable eye disease in infancy and childhood can have far-reaching implications for vision and, in some cases, for general health. In fact, if left untreated in children, certain eye conditions may develop in ways that cannot be corrected later in life; some cases could even lead to permanent vision loss.<sup>1</sup> The [American Academy of Ophthalmology](#) and the [Florida Society of Ophthalmology](#) have issued five top tips for parents to follow to ensure healthy vision of school-aged children.

**Tip 1: Get a child's vision screened early – and regularly.** The American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends that children receive [vision screenings](#) when they are newborns, between the ages of six months to one year and between the ages of three and three-and-a-half.<sup>2</sup> Upon entering school, or whenever a problem is suspected, children's eyes should again be screened for visual acuity and alignment.

Vision screening can be performed by a pediatrician, family physician, nurse or technician at regular office visits. In addition, many day care programs, churches, schools and health departments offer vision screening programs for children. They are fairly brief and can indicate the presence of an existing or potential vision problem, which would then need further investigation by an ophthalmologist. In contrast, a comprehensive eye exam usually lasts up to an hour and is performed by an ophthalmologist or optometrist. Unless a problem is detected, or there is family history of pediatric eye disease, there is no need for a comprehensive eye exam.

**Tip 2: Research your family history of childhood eye disease or impairment.** If you have not already done so, find out if your family has any history of pediatric eye conditions, which could put your child at increased risk for the same impairment.<sup>3</sup> The most common vision problems among children and adults that are

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<sup>1</sup> Greenwald, M. J., & Parks, M. M. *Clinical ophthalmology, Vol. 1.* Harper and Row. 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Vision Screenings for Infants and Children: A Joint Statement of the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus and the American Academy of Ophthalmology. American Academy of Ophthalmology. 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, A.T. et al. Clinical features and linkage analysis of a family with autosomal dominant juvenile glaucoma. *Ophthalmology.* April 1993.

genetically determined include strabismus (cross-eyes), amblyopia (lazy eye) and refraction errors such as myopia (nearsightedness), hyperopia (farsightedness) and astigmatism. Glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration are also hereditary. If you find history of these conditions, ensure your child is seen by an ophthalmologist.

**Tip 3: Look out for symptoms of eye problems, which may include:**

- White or grayish-white color in the pupil
- An eye that flutters rapidly from side to side or up and down
- Sensitivity to light
- Complaints of eye pain, itchiness or discomfort
- Continuous redness
- Pus or crust
- Drooping eyelid(s)
- Bulging eye(s)
- Eyes that look crossed, turn out or in, or don't focus together

Screenings are the best way of detecting eye abnormalities, but if these symptoms occur, it is advisable to seek care from an ophthalmologist.

**Tip 4: If your child is found to have an eye condition, encourage them to comply with their treatment while at school.** [Strabismus](#) and [amblyopia](#) are conditions that will not correct naturally; however early treatment can be highly effective and may include wearing an eye patch, eyeglasses, eyedrops, surgery or a combination of these methods. Wearing an eye patch, a therapy known as “patching” helps strengthen the weaker eye by covering the stronger eye with an eye patch, usually in the form of an adhesive bandage. If a child has been diagnosed and is patching, encourage them to keep patching while at school. If a child is struggling with the response of peers to his patching, a new children’s book called “[Jacob’s Eye Patch](#)” may bring comfort.<sup>4</sup> If untreated, amblyopia can cause irreversible visual loss. The best time for treatment is during the preschool years.

**Tip 5: Ensure your child wears protective eye wear during sports activities.** Eye injuries are a leading cause of blindness in children in the United States and can increase a person’s risk of developing eye disease later in life. One-third of sports-related eye injuries involve children.<sup>5</sup> Children should wear protective eye wear for racket sports, hockey, field hockey, baseball and basketball, which are among the sports with the highest rates of eye injuries.

“The great majority of learning is done through the eyes” said **Jaime Membreno MD, President of the Florida Society of Ophthalmology** “So it’s important to keep track of a child’s eye and vision health as poor vision can negatively impact their ability to advance in school. Also, due to the way in which eyes develop, the earlier in childhood problems are diagnosed, the easier they can be to treat.”

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<sup>4</sup> Kobliner Shaw, B., Shaw, J. “Jacob’s Eye Patch” Simon & Schuster. 2013.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nei.nih.gov/sports/pdf/SpeakersGuide.pdf>

In addition providing tips for parents, the Academy offers teachers [The Science of Vision](#), a series of free curriculum guides created by the Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology to teach children ages 10 thru 14 about the importance of healthy eyesight. To learn more about children's eye and vision health or to find an Eye M.D. near you, visit <http://www.geteyesmart.org/> .

### **Florida Society of Ophthalmology**

**The Florida Society of Ophthalmology , represents over 500 Ophthalmologists in Florida. It is Florida's premier organization Advocating for Ophthalmologists and patient's health statewide. Find more information at [eyemd.org](http://eyemd.org)**

### **About the American Academy of Ophthalmology**

The American Academy of Ophthalmology, headquartered in San Francisco, is the world's largest association of eye physicians and surgeons — [Eye M.D.s](#) — with more than 32,000 members worldwide. Eye health care is provided by the three "O's" – [ophthalmologists, optometrists, and opticians](#). It is the ophthalmologist, or Eye M.D., who has the education and training to treat it all: eye diseases, infections and injuries, and perform eye surgery. For more information, visit [www.aao.org](http://www.aao.org). The Academy's EyeSmart® program educates the public about the importance of eye health and empowers them to preserve healthy vision. EyeSmart provides the most trusted and medically accurate information about eye diseases, conditions and injuries. OjosSanos™ is the Spanish-language version of the program. Visit [www.geteyesmart.org](http://www.geteyesmart.org) or [www.ojossanos.org](http://www.ojossanos.org) to learn more.

### **About EyeSmart**

The American Academy of Ophthalmology's EyeSmart program educates the public about the importance of eye health and empowers them to preserve their healthy vision. EyeSmart provides the most trustworthy and medically accurate information about eye diseases, conditions and injuries. OjosSanos™ is the Spanish-language version of the program. Visit [www.geteyesmart.org](http://www.geteyesmart.org) or [www.ojossanos.org](http://www.ojossanos.org) to learn more.

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