



PRESS RELEASE

TO: Editor in Charge

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Over 12 Million Children Treated for Vision Impairment Each Year

September is Children's Eye Health and Safety Month to Help Prevent Injury and Diagnose Visual Conditions

(Honolulu, Hawaii), September 12, 2007 –In the United States, more than 12 million children are treated by eye care specialists each year for a number of eye-related conditions ranging from routine vision correction to emergency care from an accident. In efforts to reduce the number of children who suffer needlessly with unaddressed vision impairment or need care for an injury, the American Academy of Ophthalmology has named September Children's Eye Health and Safety month.

The best defense in maintaining eye health is a strong offense for both children and adults.

Although it may seem early, children should start to receive regular eye screenings by age three to determine visual clarity and check for any major ocular problems. Especially for children who have been fitted for glasses, it is essential to return to the ophthalmologist every year to determine if they prescription has changed or remained the same.

"It is especially important that we see children at an early age who are at risk for a number of specific eye diseases as a result of their family medical history," said Dr. Christopher Tortora, Medical Director at the Hawaiian Eye Center. "Although rare, it is possible for children to develop retinoblastoma (a tumor that forms in the eye), infantile cataracts (clouding of the lens in a child's eye) or congenital glaucoma (the incomplete or incorrect development of the eye's drainage canal)."

Other more common ailments that appear in youngsters include amblyopia, or lazy eye, that if left untreated or undetected can lead to vision loss in the eye when the brain ceases to accept messages from that eye. Strabismus in children is a misaligned eye. Left untreated, it can turn into amblyopia. This condition can be corrected by covering the stronger eye to make the remaining eye with strabismus work harder, or with surgery and corrective lenses.

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“A number of telltale signs often indicate to a parent that their child may be suffering from a refractive error,” Dr. Tortora said. “Constant rubbing or tearing of the eyes, poor focusing or visual tracking, squinting, sitting too close to the TV or trouble reading are all indicators of a child who is either near or far sighted.”

Now more than ever, there is a wealth of choices for parents and children who require vision correction through glasses. Over time, parents and children who look for certain features in their glasses will remain most happy with their selection. For children under three, plastic frames will withstand the wear and tear of a toddler on the go best. When children are older, if they select a metal frame, parents should look for the more durable spring hinges. For very active youngsters, especially those who play sports, polycarbonate lenses, a lightweight tough material that can withstand impact, can be a wise choice to avoid glasses accidents.

Young athletes suffer the largest number of eye injuries each year, as sports participation is the leading cause of eye injuries in children. Parents should make sure their child always wears the correct form of eye protection while participating in athletics. For certain very active sports parents and children can select special glasses made for recreation, or children over 10 who are ready to meet the responsibilities associated with them can choose to wear contact lenses.

“There are a number of preventative measures parents and their children can take to avoid eye injuries, all of which can be discussed with your family eye doctor,” Dr. Tortora said. “Together with your eye doctor, many children’s eye health issues can be caught early and corrected before they cause a youngster unnecessary discomfort or problems.”

Dr. Tortora, a board certified ophthalmologist, is host of “The Hawaiian Eye Show,” a weekly informational radio program about healthy vision. He and his colleagues at Hawaiian Eye Center are committed to educating the public about the importance of preventative eye care. To learn more about a variety of eye health issues, please call the Hawaiian Eye Center at 621-8488 where *“life has never looked better.”*

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