



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **DIABETES THE LEADING CAUSE OF NEW CASES OF BLINDNESS**

**COLUMBUS** – Diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness in the United States. Of the approximately 17 million Americans with diabetes, about 6 million remain undiagnosed and untreated which can lead to diabetic retinopathy.

Diabetes is a disease that wreaks havoc on just about every part of the body, including the eyes. While many of the health problems associated with diabetes are well publicized, many people are unaware that the disease causes severe vision problems that can lead to blindness. In Ohio, there are more than 700,000 persons with diabetes, with 216,861 Ohioans 18 years and older suffering from diabetic retinopathy, according to Prevent Blindness Ohio. Persons with diabetes are also at increased risk of developing cataracts or glaucoma.

The longer you have diabetes, the more likely that you will develop diabetic retinopathy. Diabetic retinopathy affects the tiny blood vessels of the retina, causing them to break down, leak or become blocked. Unhealthy new blood vessels may also grow, distorting vision over time. Treatment for diabetic retinopathy includes laser therapy – called photocoagulation, to seal the leaking or bleeding.

"Because of the serious threat to good vision, the Ohio Department of Health and Prevent Blindness Ohio recommend people with diabetes get an annual dilated eye exam," said Thomas Joyce, diabetes program manager at the Ohio Department of Health.

"Controlling blood sugar levels and blood pressure are two additional things people can do to help reduce the risks of diabetic retinopathy."

"Diabetic retinopathy has no early warning symptoms, but it can be successfully treated if diagnosed in a timely manner," said Sherill Williams, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness Ohio.

Diabetes imposes a huge financial burden on society, especially to individuals affected by the disease and their families. According to a recent study by the American Diabetes Association, the annual cost of medical expenditures related to the disease and lost productivity rose from \$98 billion in 1997 to \$132 billion in 2002.

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While type 1 diabetes cannot be prevented, it only accounts for about 5 percent to 10 percent of all cases. The rising prevalence of type 2 diabetes, especially among children and adolescents has caused a huge increase in total cases. In addition, there are an astounding 16 million Americans ages 40-74 with pre-diabetes, a condition in which blood glucose levels are higher than normal. So what can you do to help prevent type 2 diabetes, or if you already have been diagnosed, to maintain your health? Prevent Blindness Ohio and the Ohio Department of Health has the following healthy tips:

- Get regular, dilated eye exams. .
- Maintain a healthy weight – if you are overweight, even modest weight loss can help prevent type 2 diabetes.
- Increase your physical activity – exercising 30 minutes a day five days a week can cut your risk of type 2 diabetes by more than half. It is important to check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.
- Watch and control your blood sugar levels and blood pressure.
- Quit smoking as that lifestyle change can help reduce your risk of developing diabetic retinopathy, as well as cataracts.

Visit [www.diabetes-sight.org](http://www.diabetes-sight.org) to learn more about diabetic eye disease and your risks or call Prevent Blindness Ohio for free information and brochures on diabetic retinopathy and other age-related eye diseases.

Prevent Blindness Ohio, founded in 1957, is the only voluntary, not-for-profit health organization dedicated to preventing blindness and preserving sight. It serves all 88 Ohio counties, providing direct services to more than 300,000 Ohioans annually and educating millions of consumers about what they can do to protect and preserve their precious gift of sight. Prevent Blindness Ohio is an affiliate of Prevent Blindness America, the country's second-oldest national voluntary health organization. Visit our website at [www.preventblindness.org/ohio](http://www.preventblindness.org/ohio) or call 800-301-2020 for more information.