



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE August 17, 2007

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HELP CHILDREN START SCHOOL READY TO LEARN
Send Them Off To School With Healthy Eyes

COLUMBUS— Because two out of three children in the United States do not receive critical eye care services before the age of six, many children are at risk of suffering vision loss. Without a certified vision screening or eye exam, a child may have serious undetected vision problems. Since so much of learning is processed visually, eye disorders can have a tremendous effect on a child's performance in the classroom.

Prevent Blindness Ohio has declared August as Children's Eye Health and Safety Month in an effort to educate the public on the importance of quality eye care. Some potentially blinding eye diseases and conditions can be detected early in life. Prevent Blindness Ohio recommends children have their vision checked at infancy, 6 months, 3 years and 5 years, with follow-ups as needed.

In an attempt to bridge the gap for access to proper eye care, Prevent Blindness Ohio and Prevent Blindness America helped to develop the "Vision Care for Kids Act of 2007." The legislation would provide funding for eye exams and follow-up care for qualified children. Bills were introduced at the federal level in both the House of Representatives and the Senate earlier this year. Prevent Blindness Ohio and other leading vision health groups are hoping to have the legislation passed within the coming weeks.

"We already know that one in twenty preschool children have a vision problem. What we need to do now is to develop programs to provide children in need with the professional eye care they deserve," said Sherry Williams, President and CEO. "We ask everyone to contact their representatives and urge their support for vision services."

Eye problems can range from common refractive errors such as nearsightedness and farsightedness, to serious eye disease. Possible vision conditions in children include:

Amblyopia or "lazy eye" - the most common cause of visual impairment in children. As the brain develops and receives diminished images from the affected eye, it begins to suppress those

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images and favor the unaffected eye. If this condition persists, the weaker eye may become useless. Amblyopia becomes more difficult to treat effectively as the child becomes older. It is estimated that as many as 3 percent of children in the United States have some degree of vision impairment due to amblyopia. Amblyopia is responsible for vision loss in more people under 45 than all other eye diseases and trauma combined.

Strabismus or “crossed eyes” – condition where eyes are misaligned, or do not line up with each other. This problem is caused when the muscles do not work together. Strabismus may eventually lead to amblyopia. Approximately one in 50 children has strabismus.

Reduced Visual Acuity – the inability to see clearly up close and/or at a distance without visual correction which is usually provided through eye glasses or contact lenses. Most children do not know if they see well and cannot tell the adults in their life that they need help. The inability to see clearly can affect academic performance and socialization. A certified vision screening or eye exam can detect acuity problems. Approximately 25% of school-aged children need vision correction for reduced acuity, but half go undetected and untreated.

Congenital Cataract – a clouding of the eye’s lens which blocks light needed for sight. Some cataracts are present at birth or can develop during the first few months or years of life. In many cases, the cause is unknown. In older children, cataracts are often related to eye injuries. Depending on the severity of the cataract, surgery may be required. Approximately 0.4 percent of all children are born with cataracts in one or both eyes.

Congenital Glaucoma – a group of diseases that diminishes peripheral vision. Children born with the disease may have symptoms such as cloudy eyes, sensitivity to light and excessive tearing. Most cases of congenital glaucoma require surgery. According to the International Glaucoma Association, it is present in one in 10,000 births.

For more information on children’s vision topics or the “Vision Care for Kids Act,” please call Prevent Blindness Ohio at 614-464-2020 or visit www.pbohio.org.

Prevent Blindness Ohio is celebrating 50 years as Ohio's leading volunteer nonprofit public health organization dedicated to preventing blindness and preserving sight. Founded in 1957 by U.S. Senator John Bricker and Lion's Club Member, Bob Morrison with support from Nationwide, the Ohio Department of Health and Delta Gamma Fraternity, PBO serves all 88 Ohio counties. We provide direct services to more than 800,000 Ohioans annually and educate 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. For more information or to make a contribution, visit our website at www.pbohio.org or call 800-301-2020.

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