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AT HOME AND AT PLAY, THOUSANDS OF AMERICANS SUFFER PREVENTABLE EYE INJURIES

Prevent Blindness Ohio Reminds Everyone to Protect Their Eyes

Columbus, OH– Prevent Blindness Ohio has declared September as Sports and Home Eye Safety Awareness Month in an effort to encourage the public to make a priority of protecting their sight.

Playing sports is an ideal way to stay in shape and remain active. However, a serious eye injury can sideline even the best athletes permanently such as last week's case of St. Louis Cardinals' outfielder, Juan Encarnacion. As Mr. Encarnacion was standing in the on-deck circle at a game against the Cincinnati Reds, he was struck in the head by a foul ball with enough force that it rolled several feet in the opposite direction. He sustained multiple fractures of his left eye socket. Doctors are not optimistic that he will regain his full vision and resume his career.

It is estimated that there are more than 600,000 sports related eye injuries in America every year. And, 40,000 of those require emergency room care. Fortunately, 90 percent of all sports-related eye injuries can be prevented just by wearing the proper eye protection.

“Every 13 minutes, another emergency room treats a sports eye injury that could have easily been prevented,” said Sherill K. Williams, President and CEO of Prevent Blindness Ohio. “Although eye injuries can occur at any age, it's young people who are the most at risk, making up 66 percent of all injuries. Sports injuries pose a serious threat to vision yet few people take the necessary precautions to protect sight,” added Williams. “We encourage parents, schools and sports organizations to take leadership roles in promoting the use of safety eyewear.”

There is no evidence that wearing eye protection hampers athletic performance. Eye injuries can include painful corneal abrasions, blunt trauma and penetrating injuries. Severe injuries can result in vision loss and in some cases, blindness.

Prevent Blindness Ohio (PBO) recommends that all functionally one-eyed athletes and athletes whose eye doctor recommends eye protection after eye surgery or trauma should wear sports protective eye wear

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with polycarbonate lenses, meeting the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) standard, when participating in any of the following sports: air rifle, BB gun, paintball, basketball, baseball/softball, cricket, lacrosse, hockey (field and ice), squash, racquetball, fencing, boxing, martial arts, tennis, badminton, soccer, volleyball, water polo, football, fishing, golf, swimming, diving, skiing (snow and water), wrestling and bicycling. Functionally one-eyed athletes are those who have a best corrected visual acuity of worse than 20/40 in the poorer-seeing eye.

Prevent Blindness Ohio recommends the following eye protection for several popular sports:

- Baseball: Polycarbonate face guard or other certified safe protection attached to batting helmet; sports goggles with polycarbonate lenses for playing in the field.
- Basketball: Sports goggles with polycarbonate lenses.
- Fencing: Full face cage.
- Field Hockey: Goalie: full face-mask; all others: sports goggles with polycarbonate lenses.
- Handball/Racquetball/Squash: Sports goggles with polycarbonate lenses. Ice Hockey. Helmet and full-face protection.
- Lacrosse: Helmet and full-face protection.
- Soccer: Sports goggles with polycarbonate lenses.
- Softball: Polycarbonate face guard on batting helmet; sports goggles with polycarbonate lenses for playing in the field.
- Street Hockey: Sports goggles with polycarbonate lenses; goalie: full-face cage.
- Swimming and pool sports. Swim goggles recommended.
- Tennis/doubles: Sports goggles with polycarbonate lenses.
- Tennis/singles: Sturdy street-wear frames with polycarbonate lenses.
- Water Polo: Swim goggles with polycarbonate lenses.

Playing sports without eye protection is hazardous, but the most dangerous place for eyes is the home. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) states that in 2006, more than 219,000 Americans went to the emergency room to be treated for eye injuries. And, more than half, (or 125,127), of those injuries occurred in the home, more than any other location.

When chemicals such as household cleaners, bleach and paint enter the eye, they can cause painful and serious damage. Lawn maintenance can also be hazardous to eyes as clippings from trimmers or rocks and debris thrown by lawnmowers become airborne. And those working on cars or other machinery in the garage can suffer injuries when battery acid, gasoline and other liquids splash on to the face and enter the eyes.

Fortunately, these injuries are also preventable by simply wearing the proper eye protection. Safety goggles should have “ANSI Z-87” stamped on the lenses or frames, meaning they have been certified by the American National Standards Institute. After any project, make sure hands are washed thoroughly before touching the eyes or face.

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“When we perform the same chores or tasks around the house, week after week, we can get complacent about how quickly accidents can happen,” said Williams. “We all need to take extra care when we’re at home to protect our sight and not wind up in the emergency room.”

Children are also at-risk for eye injuries in the home. Everyday household items such as hangers, glue or pencils can suddenly become very dangerous, causing many accidental injuries. Injuries may include burns, contusions, abrasions or punctures.

Prevent Blindness Ohio offers these tips on selecting safety eyewear for home use:

- Use safety glasses with side protection for flying particles, dust or debris.
- Use safety goggles for more serious flying objects or chemical protection.
- If you use a face shield as additional protection, but be sure to wear it over safety glasses or goggles.
- If you wear prescription glasses, many safety glasses or goggles will fit over your regular glasses.
- Welding or brazing requires special safety goggles or helmets. Consult your equipment instruction or supplier for the proper protection.

For more information on how to protect your eyes at home and while playing sports 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.

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