



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HELP CHILDREN START SCHOOL READY TO LEARN
Send Them Off to School with Healthy Eyes

COLUMBUS, OH – In the coming weeks, thousands of Ohio children will be sent off to their very first day of preschool or kindergarten. Sending kids off to school with healthy vision can make a world of difference in how they excel in this new environment. Eighty percent of what a child learns is visual - good vision is critical to learning. Undetected vision problems can affect how well a child performs in the classroom. Sometimes, children with vision problems are even misdiagnosed as having learning disabilities.

An estimated 47,300 Ohio preschool children (1 in 20) have a vision disorder including amblyopia (lazy eye) and strabismus (crossed eyes) that can lead to loss of vision. Half of these vision disorders go undetected or untreated and are responsible for vision loss in more people under 45 than all other eye diseases and trauma combined.

Many eye problems in children can be effectively treated and corrected if diagnosed early. Sadly, most children do not even realize that their vision is abnormal and grow up thinking that how they see is how everyone else sees. As a child develops, an eye disease becomes more difficult to correct.

“That’s why it’s important for parents to establish a routine of regular eye care for children to lay the foundation for a lifetime of healthy vision,” said Sherill Williams, President and CEO of Prevent Blindness Ohio.

In an effort to help save children's vision, Prevent Blindness Ohio, along with Prevent Blindness America, has declared August as Children's Eye Health and Safety Month and has developed an internet portal to help parents, children, educators and healthcare professionals learn about eye health and safety. This internet resource was made possible through voluntary donations by the citizens of Ohio to the Save Our Sight Fund, which is administered by The Ohio Department of Health.

Wiseabouteyes.org includes specific, interactive experiences including games and coloring pages that teach parents and children fun facts about the eye and their gift of sight. The website also provides information for health care professionals on children’s eye health and the importance of vision screening and regular professional eye care. Educators can access activities to complement health, science and technology classroom lessons.

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Visitors to the website can register on-line to attend a preschool vision screening training and request educational programs for their community. Individuals can also request additional information about any of Prevent Blindness Ohio's vision education initiatives.

Prevent Blindness Ohio recommends a continuum of eye care for children to include both vision screening and comprehensive eye examinations. All children, even those with no signs of trouble, should have their eyes checked at regular intervals. Any child who experiences vision problems or shows symptoms of eye trouble should receive a comprehensive eye examination by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist.

What can a parent do to help ensure that their children's eyes are healthy? Watch for the following signs:

What do your child's eyes look like?

- * Eyes don't line up; one eye appears crossed or looks out
- * Eyelids are red-rimmed, crusted or swollen
- * Eyes are watery or red (inflamed)

How does your child act?

- * Rubs eyes a lot
- * Closes or covers one eye
- * Tilts head or thrusts head forward
- * Blinks more than usual
- * Squints eyes or frowns

For more information on amblyopia and other children's vision issues, call Prevent Blindness Ohio at 800-301-2020 or visit www.pbohio.org.

Prevent Blindness Ohio, founded in 1957, is Ohio's leading volunteer nonprofit public health organization dedicated to preventing blindness and preserving sight. We serve all 88 Ohio counties, providing direct services to more than 800,000 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. For more information or to make a contribution, visit our website at www.pbohio.org or call 800-301-2020.

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2008 CHILDREN'S EYE HEALTH AND SAFETY FACT SHEET

- Amblyopia, which affects 2-3 percent of all children, is responsible for more loss of vision in people age 45 and younger than all other eye diseases and trauma combined.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), only one in three children in America have received eye care services before the age of six.
- More than 12.1 million school-age children, or one in four, have some form of vision problem. The NEI reports that the most prevalent and significant vision disorders of preschool children are amblyopia (2-5 percent), strabismus (3-4 percent) and significant refractive error (15-20 percent).
- About 80 percent of learning in a child's first 12 years comes through the eyes. (CheckYearly.com)
- Amblyopia is reduced vision in an eye that cannot be corrected by glasses alone. It can lead to monocular blindness if left untreated. With early detection and treatment, the chance for restoring vision is excellent. An encouraging recent study showed children up to the age of 17 can still be effectively treated for amblyopia.
- Amblyopia is the most common cause of visual impairment in childhood. It affects approximately 2 to 3 out of every 100 children. (National Eye Institute)
- Untreated amblyopia costs the U.S. nearly \$7.4 billion in earning power each year. There is a return of \$22 for each dollar spent on amblyopia diagnosis and treatment. (Membreno JH, Brown MM, Brown GC, Sharma S, Beauchamp GR., "A Cost Analysis of Therapy for Amblyopia," *Ophthalmology*, December 2002)
- Amblyopia has many causes. Any underlying condition that causes the brain to receive images of unequal quality in the two eyes (one eye focuses better than the other) can cause amblyopia. Most often it results from a misalignment of a child's eyes, such as crossed eyes (strabismus). There is an increased risk in pre-term infants, low birth weight infants and in children born with disabilities such as cerebral palsy and Down syndrome.
- About one in 50 children in America has strabismus. Half of these children are born with the condition. An illness or accident may also cause strabismus.
- Congenital cataracts are present at birth but may not be identified until later in life. Cataract surgery is the treatment of choice and should be performed when patients are younger than 17 weeks to ensure minimal or no visual deprivation. Most ophthalmologists opt for surgery much earlier, ideally when patients are younger than 2 months, to prevent irreversible amblyopia. (Mounir Bashour, MD, PhD, "Cataract, Congenital," *emedicine.com*, April 2006)
- According to the International Glaucoma Association, glaucoma in infants is present in one in 10,000 births. Symptoms of glaucoma in babies and children may include:
 - Large eyes

- Sensitivity to light
 - Cloudy eyes
 - Watering eyes
 - Poor vision and jerky eyes (Nystagmus)
 - Squinting
- Vision screenings and professional eye examinations are recommended as part of a continuum of vision care for children. Prevent Blindness America recommends children have their vision checked at infancy, 6 months, 3 years, 5 years and follow-ups as needed.
 - The CDC reports that 40 percent of all sports-related eye injuries are to kids, ages 14 and younger. And, only 14.6 percent of kids say they consistently wear eye protection while playing sports. Boys were more likely to wear eye protection than girls.
 - Keep dangerous household products out of reach of children and buy only toys that are age-appropriate.
 - Protect your children's eyes from the sun. Kids should wear polycarbonate sunglasses to protect their eyes from harmful UV rays. The glasses should be marked with a label that indicates they provide 99-100 percent UV-A and UV-B protection. Wide-brimmed hats block about 50 percent of UV rays when worn alone.

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**PREVENT BLINDNESS OHIO
CHILDREN'S EYE HEALTH AND SAFETY PSA**

:30 PSA

DID YOU KNOW THAT A CHILD'S VISION PROBLEM CAN SERIOUSLY AFFECT HIS OR HER PERFORMANCE AT SCHOOL? WHEN KIDS CAN'T SEE CLEARLY, IT CAN AFFECT THEIR ABILITY TO LEARN. CHILDREN MAY HAVE EYE CONDITIONS SUCH AS LAZY EYE, CROSSED EYES, CATARACTS OR EVEN GLAUCOMA, AND NOT EVEN KNOW IT. MANY EYE PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN CAN BE EFFECTIVELY TREATED AND

CORRECTED IF DIAGNOSED EARLY. START THE SCHOOL YEAR OFF RIGHT BY GETTING YOUR CHILD'S VISION CHECKED. PREVENT BLINDNESS OHIO URGES YOU TO MAKE A VISION TEST PART OF YOUR CHILD'S BACK-TO-SCHOOL PREPARATIONS. FOR FREE INFORMATION ON WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOUR CHILD'S SIGHT, CALL PREVENT BLINDNESS OHIO TODAY AT 614-464-2020 OR VISIT WWW.PBOHIO.ORG.

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