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AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION EXPECTED TO BALLOON TO CLOSE TO 3 MILLION CASES IN THE NEXT 15 YEARS

Education and Early Detection Are the Best Tools for Fighting AMD

CHICAGO (Jan. 21, 2005) – Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) is still not a commonly known affliction, yet approximately 1.65 million Americans age 50 and older have the disease, according to the *Vision Problems in the U.S.* report, published by Prevent Blindness America. And according to *The Archives of Ophthalmology*, these numbers are expected to grow to 2.95 million cases by the year 2020, due to the rapidly aging population.

AMD robs people of their central vision and often, the ability to read a book, recognize a face, see fine details, and distinguish some colors. There are two forms of AMD: "dry" and "wet". Dry AMD is the most common form of the disease. It involves the presence of drusen – fatty deposits that form under the light-sensing cells in the retina. Vision loss in dry AMD usually progresses slowly. Wet AMD is less common, but more rapidly threatening to vision. Wet AMD causes tiny blood vessels under the retina to leak or break open. This distorts vision and causes scar tissue to form. Laser therapies can be effective in controlling the advances of wet AMD, but are ineffective in treating dry AMD.

Although there is no known cure for AMD, research continues for the disease, including promising new drug therapies designed to slow the effects of AMD. Diets rich in certain antioxidants, including lutein and zeaxanthin can help protect the eyes against AMD and a study by the National Eye Institute suggests that pharmacological-level doses of zinc, vitamins C and E, and beta carotene may help slow the progression of AMD. The benefits of the nutrients were seen only in people who were at high risk of developing advanced AMD, those with intermediate AMD in one or both eyes, and those with advanced AMD in one eye only. Vision rehabilitation by a low vision specialist can help persons with AMD to make the best use of their remaining vision.

The exact cause of AMD is unknown, but risk factors for the disease include age, race (Caucasians are more susceptible), smoking and those with cardiovascular disease and hypertension. Patients with a family history of the disease are also at high-risk. Those who are at high risk of AMD require periodic, dilated eye exams.

“Advances in AMD research have been profound over recent years,” said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president for Prevent Blindness America. “But, until we can find a cure, the best way we can fight the disease is through early detection and treatment.”

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PBA Offers Free Information to Fight AMD

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Garrett suggests regular eye exams through an eye care professional as well as the utilization of free tools and information provided by Prevent Blindness America through its Web site, www.preventblindness.org, and toll free number, 1-800-331-2020.

“We’ve designed specific programs to educate the public on the seriousness of AMD and to give people the tools they can use in order to fight it,” added Garrett. The Web site offers a user-friendly AMD test, along with other useful information, that can help visitors determine if they are at-risk.”

The following are some signs of AMD:

- Straight lines such as telephone poles, the sides of buildings or streetlight poles, look wavy.
- Written text and/or type can appear blurry.
- A dark or empty spot may block the center of your vision.

If you notice any of these changes, schedule a dilated eye exam as soon as possible.

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the Web at www.preventblindness.org.

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