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## **CATARACTS CONTINUE TO BE LEADING CAUSE OF VISION LOSS AND BLINDNESS IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE WORLD**

**CHICAGO (July 29, 2008)** – There are currently more than 22 million Americans age 40 and older with cataract. It is the number one age-related eye disease, with more cases than glaucoma, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy combined. An updated study from Prevent Blindness America and the National Eye Institute proves as estimated that eye disease diagnoses, including cataract, continue to rise. The World Health Organization states that, globally, cataract is the leading cause of blindness.

“Cataract is something that most of us will develop at some point in our lives,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “The key is to understand what we can do now to help protect our vision in the future.”

Cataract is a clouding of the eye’s lens. Over time, old cells in the lens build up and block light as it tries to pass through. Generally, a cataract does not cause pain, redness or tears. Symptoms may include blurred or double vision, lights seeming to be too dim or sensitivity to strong light. A milky or yellow spot may also be noticeable in the eye.

Americans spend \$6.8 billion every year on direct medical costs for outpatient, inpatient and prescription drug services for cataract, according to the 2007 “Economic Impact of Vision Problems: The Toll of Major Adult Eye Disorders, Visual Impairment, and Blindness on the U.S. Economy” study funded by Prevent Blindness America. And because of the aging U.S. population, it is projected that more than 30.1 million Americans will have cataracts by the year 2020.

Fortunately, surgery to remove cataracts has a 95 percent success rate resulting with patients vision of 20/20 to 20/40. In fact, it is the most frequently performed surgery in the United States. Every year on average, 3 million Americans undergo cataract surgery. Prevent Blindness America has designated August as Cataract Awareness Month in an effort to educate the public on the disease, risk factors and surgery options.

More than half of all Americans have cataracts by the time they are 80 years old. However, although many associate cataracts with the elderly, it can occur at any age. Congenital cataracts are present at birth. Newborns with cataracts in one eye should undergo surgery no later than at 4 months of age, according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology. For those patients with cataracts in both eyes, if surgery is an option, one eye should be operated on within a few days of the other.

The probability of developing a cataract later in life increases with age. However, there are also several possible risk factors for cataracts, such as:

- Intense heat or long-term exposure to UV rays from the sun
- Certain diseases, such as diabetes
- Inflammation in the eye
- Hereditary influences
- Events before birth, such as German measles in the mother
- Long-term steroid use
- Eye injuries
- Eye diseases
- Smoking

For free information on cataracts in both English and Spanish, or to receive the “Your Guide to Cataract Surgery” and “Medicare Benefits and Your Eyes” fact sheets, call 1-800-331-2020 or log on to [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org).

### **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, certified vision screening training, 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](http://www.preventblindness.org).

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