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For more information:
Prevent Blindness America
Sarah Hecker
(312) 363-6035

MAJOR CAUSE OF VISION LOSS IN CHILDREN CAN GO UNDETECTED

Early Diagnosis and Treatment of Amblyopia Can Reverse Damaging Effects

CHICAGO (July 24, 2008) – When Kari Haegele realized that her 6-year-old daughter, Sophie, was having trouble seeing out of her right eye, she made an appointment with her eye doctor. The diagnosis was amblyopia, the most common cause of visual impairment in childhood. In fact, amblyopia alone is responsible for more loss of vision in people age 45 and younger than all other eye diseases and trauma combined.

Amblyopia occurs when the brain and the eye are not working together effectively. As the brain develops and receives diminished images from the affected eye, it begins to suppress those images and favor the unaffected eye. If this condition persists, the weaker eye may become useless.

According to the National Eye Institute, nationwide, two to five percent of children ages three to five have amblyopia, three to four percent have strabismus, and 10-15 percent have significant refractive error. Additionally, vision problems can negatively impact learning and school performance, as 80 percent of learning in young children is done visually. That's why Prevent Blindness America has designated August as Children's Eye Health and Safety Month in an effort to educate parents and caregivers on the importance of vision care for children.

Fortunately for Sophie, her mother recognized a problem early on and her doctor was able to begin effective eye patching treatment immediately. During the process, Mrs. Haegele signed her daughter up for Prevent Blindness America's Eye Patch Club, a program geared towards children with amblyopia and their families. The Eye Patch Club program is designed to encourage children to wear their eye patches as prescribed by their doctor. Among other materials, members of the club receive their own special calendar and stickers.

The stickers are placed on the calendar for each day the child wears his or her patch. Once the calendar is complete, the child may send it into Prevent Blindness America to receive a special prize. Proceeds from the sale of the kits go to Prevent Blindness America's sight-saving programs.

"Sophie is doing wonderfully now and currently has 20/25 vision in her right eye and we will hopefully be done with her eye patching very soon," said Kari Haegele. "Thanks to her own diligence in wearing her patch every day,

combined with her family's support and eye doctor's care, Sophie is well on her way to a lifetime of healthy vision."

As children are preparing to head back to school, Prevent Blindness America urges parents to add an appointment to the eye doctor to the "to do" list.

"The good news is that amblyopia and strabismus can be effectively treated if it's found early," said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. "We urge all parents and caregivers to have their child's vision checked as soon as possible to protect the precious gift of sight."

For more information on amblyopia and other children's vision issues, or to sign up for The Eye Patch Club, call 1-800-331-2020 or log onto 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 and 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.

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