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## **LEADING CAUSE OF BLINDNESS IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN CAN BE AVOIDED THROUGH PROPER SPORTS EYE PROTECTION**

***-Sports-related Eye Injuries Cost Up to \$200 Million a Year-***

**CHICAGO** – Sports can be a beneficial part of growing up, teaching children social skills as well as providing an environment for healthy physical activity. Unfortunately, eye injuries can sideline kids for more than just one season. According to the National Eye Institute (NEI), eye injuries are the leading cause of blindness in school-aged children. And, most of those injuries are sports-related.

There are more than 100,000 sports-related eye injuries every year with 42,000 requiring emergency care. In fact, a U.S. emergency room treats a patient with an eye injury due to sports every 13 minutes. Prevent Blindness America, the nation's oldest volunteer eye health and safety organization, has dedicated September as Sports Eye Health and Safety Awareness Month to educate the public on how to make sure their eyes are safe while playing sports.

The NEI also states that baseball is the sport responsible for the greatest number of eye injuries in children aged 14 and younger. In fact, The Coalition to Prevent Sports Eye Injuries reports that approximately 1 in 50 Little League players will sustain an eye injury that requires attention. However, basketball is the leading cause of eye injuries in those aged 15 to 24.

“We already know that 72 percent of all sports-related eye injuries are to those aged 25 and younger. Yet, only 15 percent of children wear eye protection,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “We strongly support all efforts to ensure that children use appropriate safety eyewear for every sport in which they participate.”

Common injuries among athletes who do not wear approved protection include painful scratches on the cornea, inflamed iris, fracture of the eye socket, swollen or detached retinas, traumatic cataract and blood spilling into the eye's anterior chamber. Injuries can range from temporary to permanent vision loss.

The financial impact of sports-related eye injuries is also significant, costing between an estimated \$175 to \$200 million annually. Additionally, one in eight victims of severe eye

injury due to sports initiates legal proceedings against parties that are assumed to be responsible.

Fortunately, 90 percent of all sports-related eye injuries can be prevented just by wearing the proper eye protection. Lenses should be made of polycarbonate and have an American Society of Testing Materials (ASTM) label, indicating they meet the standards of the ASTM for the specific sport. There is no evidence that wearing eye protection hampers athletic performance.

“Through educating coaches, parents and children we hope to put an end to unnecessary blindness and vision loss from sports-related injuries,” added Parry. “By encouraging our kids, leading by example, and demanding their safety, we hope to help ensure a lifetime of healthy vision.”

For more information on sports eye health and safety, including a listing of recommended eye protection by sport, please call Prevent Blindness America at 1-800-331-2020 or visit [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 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](http://www.preventblindness.org).

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