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MOST EYE INJURIES IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN ARE SPORTS-RELATED

***-Prevent Blindness America Urges Public to Make Eye Safety
While Playing Sports a Priority-***

CHICAGO (Aug. 27, 2009) – Every 13 minutes, an emergency room treats a sports-related eye injury. And, 43 percent of sports-related eye injuries are to children ages 14 and younger. Prevent Blindness America has dedicated September as Sports Eye Health and Safety Awareness Month to encourage parents and children to make eye safety part of the game plan.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Ophthalmology issued a joint statement strongly recommending protective eyewear for all those who play sports in which there is a risk for eye injury. And, the American Optometric Association created a resolution to prevent sports-related eye injuries by addressing an individual athlete's needs, identifying monocular athletes and inform patients of the need for protective eyewear. Prevent Blindness America fully supports these positions and advises that all parents ask their eye care professional what type of eye protection he or she recommends for every sport that their child participates in.

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. And, polycarbonate eyewear is 10 times more impact resistant than other plastics, according to the National Eye Institute.

“The good news is that sports-related eye injuries are easily preventable just by simply wearing the correct eye protection,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “Unfortunately, only 15 percent of children and 33 percent of adults reported that they consistently do that. We need parents to get in the game of safety and show our kids how important it is to protect our eyes now to help insure a lifetime of healthy vision.”

Eye injuries can include painful corneal abrasions, blunt trauma and penetrating injuries, 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.

Prevent Blindness America offers free information to the public on the best way to prevent eye injuries from sports. The new Prevent Blindness America “Children’s Eye Safety Brochure: A Guide for Parents, Teachers, School Nurses and Coaches” – made possible by a grant from the Transitions® Healthy Sight for Life Fund – provides education on eye injury risk factors, a listing of the recommended types of eye protection for the most popular sports and tips on what to do in case of an eye injury emergency. The new booklet provides information on becoming an advocate for the use of protective eyewear anywhere and anytime sports are played.

Online users can join the Prevent Blindness America Vision Web Forum at preventblindness.org/sportsforum to discuss sports-related eye health and safety topics with other concerned adults. Free fact sheets are also available, including “Recommended Sports Eye Protectors,” and “Tips for Buying Sports Eye Protectors.”

To request a copy of the Children’s Eye Safety Brochure: A Guide for Parents, Teachers, School Nurses and Coaches brochure, fact sheets, or for more information on sports eye health and safety, call Prevent Blindness America at (800) 331-2020 or visit preventblindness.org/sports.

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, Prevent Blindness America is committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call (800) 331-2020 or visit us on the Web at preventblindness.org.

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