

## **TANNING AND EXCESSIVE SUN EXPOSURE CAN CAUSE SEVERE DAMAGE TO EYES**

### ***Prevent Blindness America Warns Public on Dangers of UV Rays to Vision***

**CHICAGO (April 30, 2008)** – As the weather begins to warm, some Americans may want to head to their local tanning salon to get a good “base tan” before they don their bathing suits and shorts. But without the proper protection, tanning beds can cause serious burns, not just to the skin but to the eyes. According to the American Academy of Dermatology, more than 1 million Americans use tanning salons every day.

Unfortunately, some people believe that tanning beds are safer than tans from the sun, but research has shown that ultraviolet (UV) radiation levels of a tanning bed are 100 times that of the natural sun. Tanning beds emit both UVA and UVB rays that can cause photokeratitis, or a burn of the cornea (the clear surface of the eye). Symptoms can range from painful tearing and redness of the eye to extreme cases of temporary loss of vision. As with most sunburns to the skin, symptoms may not appear until 6-12 hours after exposure.

Tanning facilities are required by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) to provide clean, UV-blocking goggles to all consumers. Wearing regular sunglasses or placing cotton balls over the eyes is not sufficient protection. The New Jersey Society of Optometric Physicians warns that using a tanning bed without protective eye goggles is the “equivalent to staring at the sun.”

Most UV damage is cumulative, meaning that the damage will not appear until years later. Tans from tanning beds or the sun are the result of skin damage.

“We tend to think that tanned skin is glamorous or attractive, but the process is actually quite dangerous,” said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America. “Damage from UV exposure can cause cataracts or be a factor in macular degeneration.”

Of course, UV-blocking eye protection should be worn during other activities besides tanning. Harmful UV rays are present from the sun reflecting on sand, water, asphalt and snow. Yet a recent survey<sup>1</sup> conducted by Transitions Optical, Inc. finds that individuals remain largely unaware of the dangers that prolonged contact with ultraviolet rays can pose to their eyes. The survey found that while nearly 80 percent of consumers are aware that UV exposure can cause skin cancer, only 5 percent know it can harm the eyes.

In addition, 57 percent of survey respondents do not wear protective eyewear when in the sun for extended periods of time. And with Americans spending an average of 3.5 hours per day outdoors – this amounts to more than 1,000 hours of UV damage to their eyes each year. Whether playing on the beach or pulling weeds in the backyard, everyone should wear eyewear that blocks 99 to 100 percent of UVA and UVB rays in conjunction with a brimmed hat. Wraparound sunglasses are the most effective in protecting the delicate skin around the eyes as well.

Children are also susceptible to UV damage and should be encouraged to wear UV-blocking eyewear for all daytime outdoor adventures, specifically between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., when UV rays are the most intense. Eye protection should even be worn during overcast days.

People who have had cataract surgery or other retinal disorders, and people who take certain medicines, such as tetracycline, sulfa drugs, birth control pills, diuretics and tranquilizers, are also at special risk for eye damage.

Prevent Blindness America has dedicated May as UV Awareness Month in an effort to educate the public on the best way to protect their eyes from UV damage. In fact, the national non-profit group has a dedicated Web resource, the “Prevent Blindness America UV Learning Center,” sponsored by Transitions Optical, Inc., which provides free information on UV, tips on purchasing the best eye protection and even a quiz to test UV knowledge. Consumers are invited to log on to [www.preventblindness.org/uv](http://www.preventblindness.org/uv). The group also offers a free brochure, “Protecting Your Eyes from the Sun.”

For more information on the dangers of UV exposure and how to choose the best options for adults and children, please visit [www.preventblindness.org/uv](http://www.preventblindness.org/uv) or call 1-800-331-2020.

### **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, 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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<sup>i</sup> Survey conducted on behalf of New England Eye Institute and Transitions Optical, Inc. from July 12 - 13, 2007 by Opinion Research Corporation.