

Young Children and Their Eyes

This BC HealthFile helps identify common vision problems in children under 4 years of age. These problems can go unnoticed if you do not know the signs or symptoms.

How developed is my child's vision?

Babies can see at birth, but they have to learn to use their eyes. They have to learn how to focus, track objects, and use both eyes together. Babies learn eye-hand coordination and how close or far things are.

By about 12 months, your child has “adult-like” vision. They are able to judge distances, and have good eye-hand-body coordination for grasping and throwing things.

During the preschool years, your child develops vision skills needed for eye-hand coordination, fine motor skills and learning to read.

Children's vision continues to develop until about 8 years of age. After that, eyesight development is complete and cannot be corrected easily.

Should vision problems be corrected at an early age?

Yes. Some vision problems need to be corrected at an early age. Some vision problems or changes can be difficult to detect or notice without testing. Some problems can end in permanent vision damage if not corrected early enough.

- **Crossed eyes** (strabismus) or the eye muscles point one or both eyes in the wrong direction.
- **Lazy eye** (amblyopia) or the vision in one eye is weaker than the other. The child's brain ignores the weak eye and uses the

strong eye to see. If untreated, the child's brain develops a clear picture in the good eye and a blurry picture in the weak eye.

Vision problems often have a family history. If you know of vision problems in your family, your child's eyes should be examined by an eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist) by 3 years of age or earlier if you notice any concerns.

Vision Problems and Symptoms

Your child should see your family doctor or eye doctor if you notice any of these signs or symptoms.

- Red, itchy or watery eyes
- Squinting, rubbing the eyes, or excessive blinking
- Drooping upper eyelid
- Sensitivity to light
- Covering or closing one eye
- Lack of concentration
- Holding objects too close
- Avoiding activities needing distance vision
- Avoiding books and television
- Bumping into things

A Child's Vision Test

Your child can have a vision test or eye exam even if your child does not talk or read yet.

Vision screening or eye exams will not be uncomfortable for your child. The public health staff or eye doctor will show your child the equipment before the tests.

The screening may check your child's:

- Eye health;
- Eye muscle movement;
- Ability to see clearly;
- Ability to tell the distance of objects; and
- Ability to see colors.

Eye Safety for Children

You can prevent eye injuries and increase eye safety for children.

- Do not allow your child to play with sharp items such as darts, scissors or sharp toys.
- Keep your child or toddler away from older children who are playing with sharp items.
- Teach children not to walk or run while carrying sharp objects, such as pencils, popsicle sticks or scissors.
- Keep your toddler away from power tools, lawn mowers or chemicals.
- Limit your child's television viewing to no more than 1 hour per day, if any.
- Place the television to reduce glare from the screen. Keep children at least 3 meters (8 to 10 feet) away from the TV screen.

Sunglasses and Protection

Ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun can cause eye damage, as well as harm your skin. Sunglasses are recommended for children and adults. To protect eyes, sunglasses should:

- Have large lenses and a wraparound design, fully covering the eyes;
- Fit well or snugly;
- Be comfortable for the child;
- Have labels stating 99-100 per cent UVA and UVB protection; and
- Come off easily if any cords or strings are attached and pulled roughly.

If your child wears corrective lenses or glasses, check these for UV protection.

Hats may provide better sun protection. Hats that shade the face and eyes can be easier for children to keep on than sunglasses.

Could my child be colour blind?

Some children, mostly boys, have trouble seeing certain colours. Your child can have a simple colour vision test by an eye doctor to check for concerns.

For More Information

For information on vision screening in your health authority, please contact your local public health unit.

To find an optometrist in your area, contact the BC Association of Optometrists at 604-737-9907, or toll-free 1-888-393-2226, or visit www.optometrists.bc.ca.

For more information on ultraviolet radiation and eyesight, see BC HealthFile [#11 Ultraviolet Light](#). See also BC HealthFile [#53b Elementary School Age Children and Their Eyes](#).

For more BC HealthFile topics visit www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm, or visit your local public health unit.

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- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
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