



Young Children and Their Vision

This HealthLink BC File helps identify common vision problems in children younger than 4 years of age. You may not notice these problems 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 the distance of people or things.

By about 1 year of age, children have “adult-like” vision. They are able to judge distances, and they have good eye-hand-body coordination for grasping, holding and throwing things.

During the preschool years, children develop vision skills needed for eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills. They also learn how to read.

Children's vision continues to develop until about 8 years of age. After that age, eyesight development is complete and it can not 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 result in permanent vision damage if these are not corrected early:

- **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 eye. 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, especially if you notice any concerns.

Vision Problems and Symptoms

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

- Red, itchy or watery eyes
- Squinting or rubbing the eyes
- Excessive blinking
- Drooping upper eyelid
- Covering or closing one eye
- Sensitivity to light
- 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 objects.
- Teach children not to walk or run while carrying sharp objects, such as pencils, pop-sicle sticks or scissors.
- Keep your child 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 metres (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 the 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 and be comfortable;
- Have labels with 99 to 100 per cent UVA and UVB protection; and

- Come off easily if any cords or strings are attached and pulled.

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

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

Could my child be colour blind?

Some children, boys more often than girls, have trouble seeing certain colours. Your child can have a simple colour vision test by an eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist) to check for any concerns.

For More Information

For information on vision screening in your area or 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 HealthLink BC File [#11 Ultraviolet Light](#). See also HealthLink BC File [#53b Elementary School Age Children and Their Vision](#).

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

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For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

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