

Elementary school age children and their vision

The majority of vision development occurs in the first few years of life. The older a child is at the time of diagnosis, the more difficult it may be to correct issues of ocular development.

Should my child have a vision test?

All children should have a comprehensive eye examination by kindergarten entry.

Children may not know that they have a vision problem. Changes in a child's vision happen very slowly. A child may think that everyone else sees the same way.

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), especially if you notice any concerns.

Some conditions can result in permanent vision damage if they are not corrected early:

- **Crossed eyes** (strabismus) is a condition where the eye muscles point one or both eyes in the wrong direction
- **Lazy eye** (amblyopia) is a condition where 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

What are some vision concerns and their symptoms?

Your child should see your family health care provider or eye doctor if you notice any of these signs or symptoms:

- Blurred vision

- Headaches
- Red, itchy or watery eyes or discharge
- Squinting or rubbing the eyes
- Excessive blinking
- Difficulty finding or picking up small objects
- Covering or closing one eye
- Drooping upper eyelid
- Tilting or holding the head in an unusual position
- Holding objects too close
- Eyes appear crossed or turned
- Reading or watching screens very closely
- Avoiding activities needing distance vision
- Trouble focusing or making eye contact
- Difficulty following objects or people
- Poor performance in school or lack of concentration
- Lack of coordination or clumsiness in physical activities

How can I help to prevent eye injuries for my child?

You can reduce the risk of eye injuries and increase eye safety for children.

- Teach children to play safely with toys and games
- Take rest breaks to avoid eye strain while doing close up activities, such as using a computer or tablet, playing video games, or watching television. These activities can decrease the natural blink reflex and cause irritated, red, or dry eyes

- Provide an area for homework that has even lighting and does not have glare or reflections. Children should take regular breaks to rest their eyes when reading
- Teach children not to walk or run while carrying sharp objects. Objects, such as pencils, keys, umbrellas, scissors, lollipop sticks, uncooked spaghetti, drinking straws, or pieces of wire, can cause an eye injury
- Teach children to sit at least 3 metres (8 to 10 feet) away from the television screen. Place the television in a spot that reduces glare or use soft lighting

What about wearing sunglasses and other types of 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
- Not have cord or string attachments. Cord and string attachments are not recommended due to the risk of strangulation. If a cord or string attachment is used, it should come off easily if pulled

If your child wears corrective lenses or glasses, make sure they have 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. Children

should wear hats when playing in the sun to prevent sunburn and any harm to their eyes.

Could my child be colour blind?

Some children, males more often than females, have trouble seeing certain colours. They can see colours, but the spectrum they can distinguish is less than people without colour deficiency. Some colours can look the same and be harder to tell apart, such as the difference between certain shades of red and green.

Your child can have a simple colour vision test by an eye doctor to check for any concerns. This can help you understand and deal with any problems your child may have in learning situations that involve colours.

For more information

For more information, see:

- [HealthLinkBC File #11 Ultraviolet radiation](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #53a Young children and their vision](#)

For more information on vision screening, contact your local public health unit.

To find an optometrist in your area, contact the BC Doctors of Optometry at

604 737-9907 or toll-free 1 888 393-2226, or visit <https://bc.doctorsofoptometry.ca/>.