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An Eye Opener: Overexposure to UV Rays Can Lead to Eye Diseases

Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) encourages simple eye care precautions during sun exposure

MILWAUKEE, WIS., May 2010 –According to the **American Optometric Association's (AOA)** American Eye-Q® survey, only one-third of Americans consider UV protection as the most important factor when purchasing sunglasses. Whether it's cloudy or sunny, summer or winter, the Wisconsin Optometric Association urges Americans to take measures to protect their eyes from the sun's UV rays in order to decrease the risk of eye diseases and disorders.

"Overexposure to UV rays is quite serious and can lead to cataracts, macular degeneration, or, in some cases, skin cancer around the eyelids," said Dr. Marcus Neitzke, **Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA)** president and Milwaukee area optometrist. "Other disorders that can occur are abnormal growths on the eye's surface and even sunburn of the eyes. These conditions can cause blurred vision, irritation, redness, tearing, temporary vision loss and even blindness."

Even more concerning is the lack of awareness surrounding the potential effects of overexposure to UV radiation. According to the American Eye-Q® survey, 35 percent of adults are unaware of the eye health risks associated with spending too much time in the sun without the proper protection.

The American Eye-Q® survey also found 66 percent of Americans purchase sunglasses for their children, but more than one in four parents make sure the lenses have proper UV protections. Additionally, less than one third (29 percent) of parents make sure their child wears sunglasses while outdoors.

"The lenses of children's eyes are more transparent than those of adults allowing shorter wavelength light to reach the retina," said Dr. Neitzke. "Because the effects of solar radiation are cumulative, it's important to develop good protection habits early, such as purchasing proper sunglasses for young children and teenagers."

The following tips from the AOA and WOA may help prevent eye and vision damage from overexposure to UV radiation:

1. Wear protective eyewear any time the eyes are exposed to UV rays, even on cloudy days and during the winter.
2. Look for quality sunglasses or contact lenses that offer good protection. Sunglasses or protective contact lenses should block 99 to 100 percent of UV-A and UV-B radiation and screen out 75 to 90 percent of visible light.
3. Check to make sure sunglass lenses are perfectly matched in color and free of distortions or imperfections.
4. Purchase gray-colored lenses because they reduce light intensity without altering the color of objects to provide the most natural color vision. Brown or amber-colored lenses may be better for those who are visually impaired because they increase contrast as well as reducing light intensity.
5. Don't forget protection for young children and teenagers, who typically spend more time in the sun than adults and are at a greater risk for damage.

For additional information on UV protection, please visit: <http://www.aoa.org/x4735.xml>, or to view a copy of the AOA's Shopping Guide for Sunglasses, please visit: <http://aoa.org/documents/SunglassShoppingGuide0810.pdf>.

About the Wisconsin Optometric Association

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 650 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed and certified to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. The WOA also maintains an affiliation with the American Optometric Association (AOA). For more information, visit WOA's Web site at www.woa-eyes.org.

About the survey

The fourth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 21 – 24, 2009, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,000 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level.)

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