

## WHEN IT COMES TO SUMMER EYEWEAR, LOOKS AREN'T EVERYTHING

*The Wisconsin Optometric Association urges consumers to take a closer look when purchasing sunglasses*

**MADISON, WI** – After much of the United States experienced an extended “polar vortex” this winter, summer has received a warm welcome across the country. So many Americans are happy to don shorts, flip flops, and most importantly, sunglasses. While plenty will look for eyewear that is fashionable, the most critical factor to keep in mind is making sure your sunglasses provide adequate protection from the harmful effects of ultraviolet (UV) rays. UV radiation, which comes from the sun (and from tanning beds), can cause significant harm to your eyes.

According to the American Optometric Association’s (AOA) 2014 American Eye-Q® survey, 41 percent of consumers do not check the UV protection level before purchasing sunglasses. In addition, only 30 percent of Americans reported that UV protection is the most important factor in their choice when purchasing sunglasses.

“The harmful effects of long-term exposure to UV rays are a real concern because they can cause serious damage to the eye, possibly resulting in cataracts, age-related macular degeneration, or abnormal growths on the eye, explains 2014 WOA President and Platteville, WI optometrist Dr. Michael Tashner.

Short-term exposure to UV rays is something to watch as well. A day at the beach without proper eye protection can be detrimental to eye health and could lead to photokeratitis, also known as “sunburn of the eye.” Symptoms of photokeratitis include red eyes, a sensation of something lodged in the eye (foreign body), a gritty feeling in the eyes, an extreme sensitivity to light, and/or excessive tearing of the eye. Patients should consult their eye doctor if they have these symptoms.

### Children’s Eyes Need UV Protection

The average child takes in approximately three times the annual UV exposure of the average adult, and up to 80 percent of his or her lifetime exposure occurs before age 20. Unlike the mature lens found in an adult eye, a child’s lens cannot filter out UV rays as easily, causing damage to the child’s retina.

“Exposure to UV rays can cause problems for people of all ages, but it is critical for children to protect their eyes since their lenses are more transparent than an adult’s. By learning to protect their eyes early, children can avoid unnecessary UV damage,” advises Dr. Tashner.

### What to Look for in Lenses and Frames

For optimal eye protection from UV rays, the WOA recommends the following:

- Lenses that block out 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B rays.
- Lenses that have a uniform tint, i.e. not darker in one area as opposed to another. Gradient lenses should lighten gradually, with the bottom being lightest.
- Lenses free of distortion and imperfections.
- A frame that fits close to the eyes and contours to the shape of the face, to prevent UV exposure from all angles.
- Prescription glasses with tints and full UV protection. While some contact lenses also offer UV protection, these should be worn with sunglasses to maximize protection.

The best way to monitor eye health, maintain good vision, and keep up-to-date on the latest in UV protection is by scheduling yearly comprehensive eye exams with your optometrist. To find an optometrist in your area, please visit <http://www.woa-eyes.org/members>.

#### **About the Survey:**

*The ninth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From March 20-25, 2014, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,000 Americans 18 years and older embodying a nationally representative sample of the U.S. general population (margin of error at 3.1 percent confidence level).*

#### **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 640 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA’s website at [www.woa-eyes.org](http://www.woa-eyes.org).*