

AVOID A TRULY SCARY HALLOWEEN AND WEAR ONLY PRESCRIPTION DECORATIVE CONTACT LENSES

Federal law prohibits consumers from purchasing decorative contact lenses without a prescription

MADISON, WI – Halloween brings fun and festivities to children and adults across the country, with costumes, candy, and parties lending this fall holiday its unique feel and atmosphere. Halloween also often means big business for a variety of retail stores, however, as consumers search for ways to maximize the fun factor of their holiday celebration. The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) and its member doctors want consumers to have both an enjoyable and safe Halloween by informing consumers about the health risks associated with wearing decorative contact lenses and alerting retailers to the fact that selling these lenses without a valid prescription from a doctor is in direct violation of federal law.

Non-corrective strength lenses designed only to change the appearance of the eyes, also known as decorative or plano lenses, are marketed and distributed directly to consumers. These lenses tend to be especially popular around the Halloween holiday. Unfortunately, the poor fitting and/or improper use of such lenses can pose serious risks to consumers' vision and eye health. Consumers purchasing these lenses from untrained individuals may receive poorly fitted or "demo" lenses with little to no instruction in proper lens care and cleaning.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates decorative lenses as medical devices, just as it regulates corrective lenses for vision. Regardless, decorative lenses continue to be illegally marketed and distributed directly to consumers through a variety of sources where they are sold as fashion accessories, including flea markets, the Internet, beauty salons, kiosks in malls, and even convenience stores.

"Decorative contacts are a concern all year long, but Halloween is the time where they are used most frequently to enhance costumes," commented Dr. Kellye Knueppel, Milwaukee and Madison area optometrist and current WOA President. "Consumers who purchase lenses without an exam and prescription from a doctor put themselves at risk of serious bacterial infection or even significant damage to the eye's ability to function, with the potential for irreversible sight loss."

Risks associated with the improper use of decorative contact lenses include conjunctivitis (eye infection), swelling, allergic reactions, and corneal abrasions due to poor lens fit. Additional medical problems may result in a reduction of visual acuity (sight) and contrast sensitivity.

The FDA has also warned consumers about serious risks of eye injury posed by the wearing of decorative contact lenses distributed without a prescription and proper fitting from a licensed eye doctor. This warning came as a result of reports received by the FDA showing the development of corneal ulcers associated with the wearing of decorative contact lenses in excess of the recommended period of time. Corneal ulcers can progress rapidly, leading to internal ocular infection. If left untreated, uncontrolled infection can then lead to corneal scarring and vision impairment. In extreme cases, this condition can result in blindness and eye loss.

If you must wear decorative contact lenses this Halloween, the WOA recommends the following tips for safety and hygiene:

- See an eye doctor for your regularly scheduled eye exam, and receive a proper fitting and prescription.
- Always wash your hands before handling contact lenses.
- Carefully and regularly clean contact lenses, as directed by your optometrist. Rub the contact lenses with fingers and rinse thoroughly before soaking lenses overnight in sufficient multi-purpose solution to completely cover the lenses.
- Store lenses in the proper lens storage case, and replace the case every three months or sooner. Clean the case after each use and keep it open and dry between cleanings.
- Use products recommended by your optometrist to clean and disinfect your lenses. Saline solution and rewetting drops are not designed to disinfect lenses.
- Only fresh solution should be used to clean and store contact lenses. Never re-use old solution. Contact lens solution must be changed according to the manufacturer's recommendations, even if the lenses are not used daily.
- Always follow the recommended contact lens replacement schedule prescribed by your optometrist.
- Remove contact lenses before swimming or entering a hot tub.

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. Over 630 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.