

AVOID A SCARY HALLOWEEN AND WEAR ONLY PRESCRIPTION COSMETIC CONTACT LENSES

Doctors of optometry warn consumers against purchasing decorative contact lenses without a prescription and fitting

MADISON, WI – Halloween brings fun and festivities to children and adults across the country, with costumes, candy, and parties all playing a large role in providing this holiday with its unique feel and atmosphere. In the world of retail, however, Halloween often equals big business for a variety of stores, as consumers search for ways to maximize the fun factor of their holiday celebration.

One trend of which you will want to be extremely watchful this year is the wearing of decorative contact lenses. These non-corrective strength lenses, which are designed only to change the appearance of the eyes, are easily accessible to consumers and are especially popular around Halloween. Unfortunately, the poor fitting and/or improper use of these lenses can cause serious risks to your vision and eye health. As a result, the **Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA)** and its member doctors wish to warn consumers about the health risks associated with wearing decorative contact lenses and warn retailers that selling these products without a valid prescription from a doctor is a direct violation of Federal Law.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates decorative lenses as medical devices, just as they do corrective lenses for vision. Yet, decorative lenses continue to be illegally marketed and distributed directly to consumers through a variety of sources, including flea markets, the Internet, beauty salons, kiosks in malls, and 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. Jeff Sarazen, Wausau 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, 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 non-corrective, 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 contact lens and eye exam to 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 lens.
- 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. Approximately 620 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.