

SURVEY REVEALS CONCERNS OVER CHILDREN'S VISION AND EYE HEALTH AS MORE CLASSROOMS GO HIGH-TECH

The Wisconsin Optometric Association offers tips to help students make the most out of high-tech classrooms

MADISON, WI – Classrooms around the country are becoming increasingly high-tech, as teachers are incorporating smartboards, tablets, and other digital tools into their daily curriculum. As a result, technology has students spending much of their time learning and socializing in front of a screen. While these devices can greatly enhance learning, they also increase the challenges posed to students' healthy vision and eye health.

According to the American Optometric Association's (AOA) 2012 American Eye-Q® consumer survey, parents have growing concerns about the effects of evolving technology in the classroom. Seventy-nine percent of parents are concerned that their child may be damaging their eyes due to technology use. In addition, sixty percent of parents estimate their children spend up to four hours a day at home or in school looking at a computer or the screen of a digital device.

"While these high-tech classrooms can greatly enhance learning, they can pose a number of challenges to the visual system," advises Dr. Jeff Sarazen, Wausau optometrist and President of the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA). "Since these new classroom devices are so compelling to students, they tend to stare at them and use them for hours at a time, which fatigues their visual system."

Unfortunately, prolonged use of these technologies can cause eye strain, headaches, fatigue, burning or tired eyes, loss of focus, blurred vision, double vision or head and neck pain, all symptoms of the condition known as Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS). CVS occurs when eye or vision problems related to near work are experienced during or related to using digital devices. "Many of these issues can be solved with frequent breaks, proper set up of computer screens, and yearly, comprehensive eye exams by a licensed doctor of optometry," explains Dr. Sarazen.

Parents and teachers can help students avoid CVS by coaching them to follow the 20-20-20 rule. At least every 20 minutes, students should take a 20-second break and view something 20 feet away when using technology or doing near work. Studies show that people need to rest their eyes to keep them moist. Plus, staring off into the distance helps the eyes from locking into a close-up position.

The WOA recommends the following guidelines to prevent or reduce vision and eye health problems associated with CVS:

- Computer screens should be about 4-5 inches below eye level, as measured from the center of the screen, and held 20-28 inches away from the eyes.
- If possible, windows or other light sources should not be directly visible when sitting in front of the monitor. If this occurs, turn the desk or computer to prevent glare on the screen.
- Reduce the amount of lighting in the room to match that of the computer screen.
- Avoid dry eye when using a computer or digital device by blinking frequently; this keeps the front surface of the eye moist.

The American Eye-Q® survey revealed 51 percent of parents do not include a visit to the eye doctor as part of their child's back-to-school routine. In order to avoid CVS and other vision and eye health problems which can negatively impact a child's learning in school, it is crucial for students to receive a comprehensive eye exam from a licensed eye doctor. According to Dr. Sarazen, "Early detection and treatment are key in correcting vision problems and helping students see clearly."

About the American Eye-Q® Survey:

The seventh annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 9-16, 2012, using an online methodology, PSB conducted 1,009 online interviews among Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of the U.S. general population (margin of error at 95 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 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.