

Eye on Health

Keep An Eye On UV Safety

American Academy of Ophthalmology Offers Tips For Safe Fun In The Sun

(NAPSA)—Whenever you rub sunscreen on to protect your skin, remember to protect your eyes as well. Studies show that exposure to bright sunlight may increase the risk of developing cataracts, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and growths on the eye, including cancer.

Through its EyeSmart™ campaign, the American Academy of Ophthalmology wants to remind Americans of the importance of protecting their eyes from the sun's harmful rays by wearing proper protection. It also wants to remind the public of the importance of protecting eyes from indoor UV light when using tanning beds.

"UV radiation, whether from natural sunlight or indoor artificial rays, can damage the eye's surface tissues as well as the cornea and lens," said Michael Kutryb, M.D., ophthalmologist and clinical correspondent for the Academy. "Unfortunately, many people are unaware of the dangers UV light can pose. By wearing UV-blocking sunglasses, you can lower your risk for potentially blinding eye diseases and tumors." It is important to start wearing proper eye protection at an early age to protect the eyes from years of ultraviolet exposure.

"Your eyes are at risk from the sun year-round," said Dr. Kutryb. However, the longer the exposure to bright light, the greater the risk. Excessive exposure to UV light reflected off sand, water or pavement can damage the eyes' front surface. In addition to

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cataracts and AMD, sun exposure can lead to lesions and tumors that may be cosmetically unappealing and require surgical removal. Pinguecula, tiny yellow bumps on the eye, are common from too much UV exposure. They begin on the white part of the eye and may eventually disrupt your vision.

Damage to the eyes from UV light is not limited to the outdoors; it is also a concern with indoor tanning beds. "Tanning beds can produce UV levels up to 100 times what you would get from the sun, which can cause very serious damage to the external and internal structures of the eye and eyelids," according to Dr. Kutryb. "Corneal burns, cataracts and, in rare instances, retinal damage can occur." It is critical that you wear the properly designed goggles for use in tanning booths to protect the eyes.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology offers these tips to protect your eyes from the sun:

- Don't focus on color or darkness of sunglass lenses: Select sunglasses that block UV rays. Don't be deceived by color or cost. The ability to block UV light is not dependent on the price tag or how dark the sunglass lenses are.

- Check for 100 percent UV protection: Make sure your sunglasses block 100 percent of UV-A rays and UV-B rays.

- Choose wrap-around styles: Ideally, your sunglasses should wrap all the way around to your temples, so the sun's rays can't enter from the side.

- Wear a hat: In addition to your sunglasses, wear a broad-brimmed hat to protect your eyes.

- Don't rely on contact lenses: Even if you wear contact lenses with UV protection, remember your sunglasses.

- Don't be fooled by clouds: The sun's rays can pass through haze and thin clouds. Sun damage to eyes can occur anytime during the year, not just in the summertime.

- Protect your eyes during peak sun times: Sunglasses should be worn whenever outside, and it's especially important to wear sunglasses in the early afternoon and at higher altitudes, where UV light is more intense.

- Never look directly at the sun: Looking directly at the sun at any time, including during an eclipse, can lead to solar retinopathy—damage to the eye's retina from solar radiation.

- Don't forget the kids: Everyone is at risk, including children. Protect their eyes with hats and sunglasses. In addition, try to keep children out of the sun between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when the sun's UV rays are their strongest.

Find Eye M.D.s or ask an Eye M.D. a question by visiting www.GetEyeSmart.org.