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Protecting Eyes from Ultraviolet Rays May Help Save Vision Today and in the Future

CHICAGO (April 24, 2014) – Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays can be very harmful to the body. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. Yet the most preventable cause of this type of cancer is exposure to UV light.

And, the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) states that basal cell carcinoma is the most common type of skin cancer to affect the eyelids and may appear on the lower lid, in the corners of the eye and under eyebrows. Many people may also not be aware of the damage that UV rays can have on the eyes and vision as well.

Prevent Blindness, the nation's oldest eye health and safety organization, has declared May as UV Awareness Month to help educate the public on the dangers of UV and steps to take to protect vision today and in the future. Because UV damage to the eyes can be immediate and cumulative, it is imperative to learn how to protect sight today.

Eye problems that UV rays can cause include:

Cataract- UV rays, especially UV-B rays, may also cause some kinds of cataracts. A cataract is a clouding of the eye's natural lens, the part of the eye that focuses the light we see.

Corneal Sunburn- Corneal sunburn, called photokeratitis, is the result of high short-term exposure to UV-B rays. Long hours at the beach or skiing without proper eye protection can cause this problem. It can be very painful and may cause temporary vision loss.

Macular Degeneration- UV rays may lead to macular degeneration, a leading cause of vision loss for older Americans.

Pterygium- A growth that begins on the white of the eye and may involve the cornea. Eventually, the growth may block vision. It is more common in people who work or spend extended periods of time outside in the sun and wind.

Skin Cancer- Skin cancer around the eyelids is also linked to prolonged UV exposure.

There are different types of UV. UV-A radiation has lower energy and penetrates deep into the eye which may injure the macula, the part of the retina responsible for sight in the center field of vision. UV-B radiation is presumably more dangerous and is mainly absorbed by the cornea and lens of the eye and can damage those tissues.

Prevent Blindness strongly recommends that both adults and children always wear both a wide-brimmed hat or cap and the proper UV-rated sunglasses. Wrap-around sunglasses are best as they protect the eyes and the skin around the eyes. There are also many types of sports eye protection glasses that offer UV protection as well. Ask an eye doctor for his or her recommendations.

“It is so important for us to always remember to protect our eyes from UV rays when headed outdoors. And, to consistently provide a good example for our children,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness. “By demonstrating the importance of protecting our vision, we can hopefully help save sight for ourselves and for generations to come.”

For more information on the dangers of UV exposure and how to choose the best UV protection, please visit the Prevent Blindness dedicated Web page at preventblindness.org/uv or call (800) 331-2020.

About Prevent Blindness

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening and training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, Prevent Blindness is committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020. Or, visit us on the Web at preventblindness.org or facebook.com/preventblindness.

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