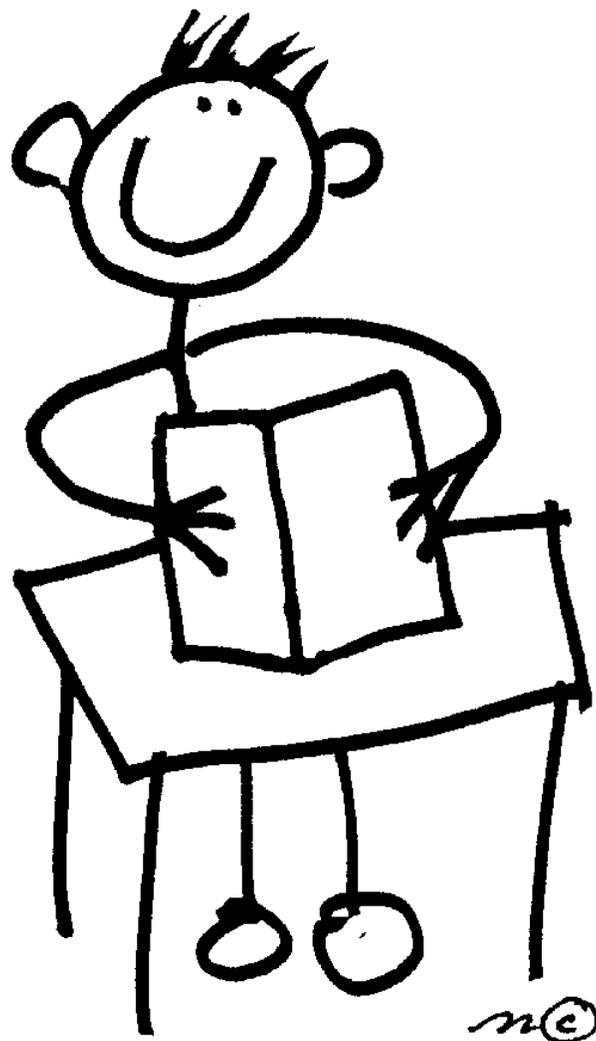


Vision Care for California's Kids



Sponsored by the **California Optometric Association**
1-800-877-5738 or visit: www.coavision.org

Why is vision care so important for kids?

Of all the senses critical to the successful development of a child, none is more fundamental than vision. It is estimated that 80% of all learning during a child's first 12 years is obtained through vision. Impaired vision can seriously interfere with a child's ability to learn in school and to participate fully in sports and other childhood activities. Undetected and untreated vision problems can negatively affect a child's self-esteem and contribute to the development of behavioral problems. Early discovery and treatment can prevent many of these problems.

Yet, vision disorders are a common pediatric problem in the United States. It is estimated that 25% of students in grades K through 6—one out of every four—have vision deficiencies. There are over 50 million children aged 17 & under in the U.S. and less than half are receiving examinations. Furthermore, there will be a 14% increase in school age children by the year 2005.

The early detection and treatment of eye and vision problems needs to be a major public health goal. School nurses are in a unique position to positively impact children's vision, having the ability and knowledge to interact with students, teachers, parents and eye care professionals. Optometrists would like to partner with school nurses to establish vision preservation and enhancement programs aimed at preventing vision conditions that may hinder students from reaching their full scholastic and personal potential.

What are the components of a vision preservation & enhancement program?

To adequately address children's vision needs, a program must consist of a carefully planned vision-screening process and, most importantly, a concerted referral and follow-up effort to an optometrist or other eye care professional for a comprehensive vision examination.

What is the difference between a school vision screening and a comprehensive vision exam?

The purpose of a vision screening is to identify those children who should be further examined by an optometrist or other eye care professional for potential problems and possible treatment. Efficacy of a vision-screening program is best achieved through careful selection and application of vision-screening procedures, utilization of trained and knowledgeable screening personnel, and establishment of appropriate referral criteria. However, even a thorough vision-screening program cannot substitute for a regular professional eye exam. The purpose of a vision screening is to detect gross visual problems to determine if there is a need for a comprehensive eye exam. Screenings are not diagnostic, nor do they lead to treatment.

A professional vision examination is essential for the diagnosis and treatment of eye and vision problems. During a comprehensive exam, not only is distance vision measured, but many other tests are performed to make sure the eyes are performing optimally. A child may have 20/20 visual acuity and still have a vision deficiency. Poor development of visual skills (including focusing, eye movements and eye teaming) is the most common cause of learning difficulties in school.

Where can a child receive a comprehensive exam?

Optometrists are the most accessible eye care professionals in the state. Optometrists are independent, primary health care providers who examine, diagnose, treat, and manage diseases and disorders of the visual system, the eye and associated structures as well as diagnose related systemic conditions. They are state-licensed and hold a doctor of optometry (O.D.) degree.

Optometrists prescribe and/or provide eyeglasses, contact lenses, low vision aids and vision therapy. They prescribe medications to treat eye diseases and perform other medical procedures. They also do testing to determine the patient's ability to focus and coordinate the eye, judge depth perception, and see colors accurately.

Optometrists are trained to provide a thorough examination of a child's vision, even if the child hasn't developed communication skills or does not cooperate well during an exam.



When should a child have a vision exam?

The American Optometric Association and the California Optometric Association recommend that all children should undergo an evaluation to detect eye and vision abnormalities during the first few months of life (no later than age 6 months) and again at about age three. It is important that a child receive a comprehensive vision exam before entering first grade to make sure they have the vision skills necessary for learning. Once a child is in school, an exam is needed every other year because vision can change quickly as a child grows. The earlier a vision problem is detected, the more responsive the visual system is to treatment. *(An optometrist can recommend appropriate exam schedules for high-risk kids.)*

If a child doesn't complain, do they still need to see an optometrist?

Yes! Children don't know how they are supposed to see and may not have any pain associated with their vision problem. Since children may not be aware that they have a vision deficiency, they may not complain or seek help.

Where can I obtain additional information?

The California Optometric Association is pleased to provide children's vision care resources to school nurses, parents and teachers in an effort to detect and treat eye and vision problems in California's kids. Please call 1-800-877-5738 for additional information.

This information is brought to you by the
California Optometric Association

2415 K Street
Sacramento, CA 95816
(800) 877-5738/(916) 441-3990
(916) 448-1423 Fax
www.coavision.org



Find an
EYEDOC

(866) 396-EYES • www.eyehelp.org