

MEDIA RELEASE

The scary risks of Halloween contact lenses

October 2021: A new study into the dangers of novelty lenses has led Optometry Australia to warn against cosmetic contact lenses purchased online, particularly ahead of upcoming Halloween celebrations.

The recent [study](#), conducted in Asia and published in the American Journal of Ophthalmology, found that coloured or decorative lens wearers were at a much higher risk of developing eye complications, partly because of poorer lens quality and partly due to the lack of education on hygiene and safe wear practice.

The study, which was conducted by an international research team from Australia and Singapore, and lead by Professor Fiona Stapleton from the University of New South Wales School of Optometry and Vision Science, also found that cosmetic contact lens wearers who presented with corneal infections tended to be young females who acquired their lenses without a prescription. Additionally, 11% of cosmetic lens wearers had purchased their lenses via the internet, compared with only 1% of refractive lens wearers.

Novelty lenses are a popular trend these days – even outside of the spooky season – but the scary thing is, they can cause serious harm to your eyes. While some clown contact lenses might nicely compliment your Pennywise costume, if you’re wearing them without properly consulting an optometrist first, you could experience some terrifying consequences.

Optometry Australia’s Chief Clinical Officer Luke Arundel says that Australians who source cosmetic lenses online are needlessly putting themselves at risk of severe eye infection and permanent vision loss.

“Cosmetic contact lenses, also known as decorative, novelty, fashion or crazy lenses, that are purchased online or over the counter are often unsafe, unregulated and non-Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approved – although some may claim to be.

“Every year, we see a growth in the number of Australians who are accessing contact lenses from dubious sources. This unfortunately means they are at a high risk of developing serious eye complications. If you wish to wear contacts, whether recreationally or frequently, it is essential that you visit an optometrist to assess whether the lenses are suitable for your eyes.

“Not only do optometrists measure each eye specifically to fit the lenses, but they also instruct you on appropriate insertion and removal techniques and safe hygiene practices to minimise your risk of permanent eye damage. You don’t get this type of education when you buy your lenses online.”

People seeking contact lenses for a once-off use, usually for an event such as Halloween, often make the mistake of treating them as accessories rather than the medical devices they are.

Arundel especially cautions young Australians who follow fads on platforms such as Instagram or TikTok (where these products regularly appear or are advertised) to be careful not to succumb to the pitfalls of buying novelty contacts from un reputable sellers.

“Rogue traders who sell novelty lenses often target unsuspecting teenagers and young adults who are usually uneducated on the dangers associated with purchasing contacts online,” Arundel says.

“Contact lenses are not toys, and shouldn’t be used without proper guidance from an eye health professional.”

It’s not all doom and gloom for Australians wanting to add a bit of flourish to their Halloween costume, however. There are coloured contact lenses available that are safe to use; you just have to [visit your optometrist](#) to start that conversation.

- ENDS -

For further information, please contact:

Trinity Scarf | Optometry Australia

t.scarf@optometry.org.au

0490 776 613

Jenna McGowan | Optometry Australia

J.mcgowan@optometry.org.au

0408 146 654

About Optometry Australia:

Optometry Australia is the peak professional body for optometrists. Representing 85 per cent of all Australia-based optometrists, Optometry Australia’s focus is to lead and advance the profession of optometry by putting eye-health front and centre of Australian health care.