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MEDIA RELEASE

Kids eye health in focus, as one in five children head back to school with an undetected vision problem

JANUARY 2021: With the start of the school year in sight, Optometry Australia is urging parents to get their children's eyes tested before heading back to the classroom.

This January, one in five children will head back to school with an undetected vision problem, despite the majority (79%) of Australian parents believing their children have great eyesight¹.

Children learn more from their vision than all other senses combined, and eye disorders are amongst the most common long-term health problems experienced by children². Despite this, 29% of Australian parents do not believe they need to take their children to the optometrist until they are older³.

Luke Arundel from Optometry Australia said it's important for parents to take their children for a routine eye examination before heading back to school to give kids the best chance at success in the classroom.

"Good vision is vital to the social and behavioural development of a child and can severely impact their experiences in a classroom if left unattended. From having trouble reading something on the whiteboard, to concentrating in class, there are a range of ways vision problems can impact learning.

"If a child is born with vision problems, they're not going to know anything different and will assume that they are seeing clearly. The best way parents can ensure there's nothing wrong with their child's vision is to visit the optometrist."

Possible signs of vision problems in children including:

- Difficulty reading, such as skipping and confusing words, and/or holding a book very close while reading
- Complaints of headaches and blurred or double vision
- Squinting, or having difficulty recognising things or people in the distance

Parents are also being reminded that it's not just inside the classroom where eyesight is impacted. Children exposed to UV radiation in the playground are at risk of short-term irritation and long-term

¹ Optometry Australia, 2020 Vision Index

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008. Eye health among Australian children

³ Optometry Australia, 2020 Vision Index

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eye damage, potentially leading to conditions such as cataracts, pterygiums, photokeratitis and macular degeneration.

Almost one in 10 Australians do not know UV protective sunglasses exist, whilst 30% believe they are unnecessary⁴, suggesting a need for greater awareness of the risk UV rays poses to eye health.

David Whetton from School Shades, an organization distributing UV protective sunglasses to schools across Australia, says many parents are unaware that our eyes are just as susceptible to sunburn as our skin.

"In Australia, we are exposed to some of the highest levels of UV in the world and kids' eyes are much more vulnerable to UV rays than adults.

"As the new school term begins, now is the time for parents to understand that protecting their child's eyes with sunglasses is just as important as wearing a hat and sunscreen in the middle of summer," said Mr. Whetton.

Commented [1]: David to approve

Optometry Australia recommends that all children have a full eye examination with an optometrist before starting school, and regularly every two to three years as they progress through primary and secondary school.

For further information on kids eye health, parents can visit their local optometrist or head to www.goodvisionforlife.com.au.

-ENDS-

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Optometry Australia is the peak professional body for optometrists. Representing eight out of every 10 Australian-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.

⁴ Optometry Australia, 2020 Vision Index