



MEDIA RELEASE

Parents warned hand sanitiser is causing eye injuries in children

MARCH 2021: Parents and caregivers have been warned that hand sanitiser can cause serious eye injuries in children.

The warning from Optometry Australia follows a French study¹ which found a significant spike in chemical eye injuries from alcohol-based hand sanitiser (ABHS) in young children due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [study](#) led by French doctors revealed there had been a seven-fold increase¹ of ABHS-related ocular exposures in children in 2020 compared to 2019.

Most ABHS-related ocular injuries can be attributed to placement of gel dispensers in relation to children's height and eye level. These dispensers are often one metre tall which is generally at the level of young children's eyes and may dispense ABHS mist or splatter into the eyes. Children may also rub unevaporated ABHS directly into their eyes.

The research found that public exposures rose in 2020 from 16.4 per cent in May to 52.4 per cent in August, and admissions to a paediatric eye hospital for ABHS related eye injuries also increased significantly during the same period².

The findings led the study's ophthalmologists and toxicologist authors to reiterate the damaging risks ABHS can have on children's eyes including large corneal and conjunctival ulcers, with the more serious injuries requiring surgery to restore vision. A delay in washing the eyes after ABHS exposure due to lack of access to water and the viscosity of some preparations were also noted as being very detrimental to the surface of the eye.

Optometry Australia's Chief Clinical Officer Luke Arundel said good vision is vital to children's educational, social and physical development, and that quality of life can be affected if poor vision is left undiagnosed.

"Parents need to be aware of the risks ABHS can pose to children's eyes, with the most severe cases leading to permanent loss of vision. When using these products, adults and children should handle them with care to avoid unwanted harm," Mr. Arundel said.

Optometry Australia advises parents understand the importance of an eye examination if exposure to ABHS occurs, as early diagnosis and treatment reduces long-term injury.

¹ [Paediatric eye injuries by hydroalcoholic gel in the context of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic, 21 January 2021](#)

² [Hand sanitiser causing eye injuries in young children during COVID-19 pandemic, 22 January 2021](#)

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There are a number of measures parents and organisations can take to avoid ABHS eye injuries in children:

- Promoting hand washing with soap and water where possible as a substitute to ABHS
- Teaching and training children how to use hand sanitiser
- Having separate dispensers at shops for children at a lower height (below face level)
- Placing caution signs next to sanitiser dispensers.

Signs and symptoms to look for that indicate your child has irritated eyes include:

- Itching or redness in their eyes
- Complaints of eye pain
- Watery or teary eyes
- Complaining about having blurred vision or sensitivity to light.

If you are concerned about your child's eyesight or if ABHS comes into contact with your children's eyes, immediately flush their eyes with water and [contact your local optometrist](#) for expert advice.

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

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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.