

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **As kids head back to school, parents warned to heed the risks of myopia**

*Leading optometrist calls on parents to see the big picture and book kids in for an eye examination*

**February 2022:** This year, more children than ever are at risk of developing myopia, Optometry Australia's Chief Clinical Officer, Luke Arundel, has warned.

With the COVID-19 pandemic having caused lockdowns around the world, researchers are starting to see signs that [these lockdowns may have further accelerated the rates of myopia development](#) in children.

The increase in myopia, also known as short sightedness, is due to a [variety of factors](#) including increased screen time and decreased 'green time' (time spent outdoors and in bright light) over the past 18 months.

Each year, one in five children will head back to school with an undetected vision problem, despite Optometry Australia's 2020 Vision Index finding that the majority (79%) of Australian parents believe their children have great eyesight.

Mr Arundel said: "It's important for parents to take their children for a regular eye examination to give them the best chance of success in the classroom, sports field and in the playground.

"Good vision is vital to the educational, social, behavioural and physical development of a child. From having trouble reading something on the whiteboard or avoiding reading because of sore eyes, there are a range of ways untreated visual disorders can impact learning.

"Poor vision can also make it difficult to read other kids' facial expressions or do fun things like catch a ball and play sports."

Some children are inaccurately labelled as slow learners, lacking confidence or even troublemakers when they actually have an undetected vision condition which can easily be identified and corrected.

Arundel continued: "While some signs of myopia are obvious, others are harder to identify, and children at a young age may not tell a parent there is anything 'wrong' as they assume everyone sees the world as they do."

Children becoming short-sighted isn't just about them having to wear glasses to help provide clear vision. High levels of myopia may cause permanent vision loss later in life through an increase in cataracts, glaucoma and problems with the retina (the sensor layer at the back of the eye).

As research and technological innovations in this area continue, optometrists now have an impressive arsenal of new management options which mean they can not only provide clear vision but slow down the progression of myopia.

“It’s crucial for children to have a full eye examination with an optometrist and then regular visits as they progress through primary and secondary school, as part of their general health regime.

“The beginning of the year is a good time to schedule in an appointment. Many parents have to-do lists around this time, to remind them to get the right school books, uniforms and stationery. Why not include checking your child’s vision, so that they can make the most of the school year?” Mr Arundel said.

Some possible signs of myopia in children to look out for include having difficulty recognising objects or people in the distance; sitting too close to the TV; squinting, frequent blinking or rubbing the eyes; complaints of headaches, blurred or ‘fuzzy’ vision.

Parents are advised to [visit an optometrist](#) with their children, to make sure that their kids have good vision for life.

- ENDS -

Hear what Aussie children have to say about eye health and regular health checks:

<https://www.childmyopia.com/videos/eye-health/>

<https://www.childmyopia.com/videos/regular-health-checks>

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**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.