

MEDIA RELEASE

Can your eyes get sunburnt? The answer is yes!

Wednesday, December 27, 2017. Melbourne: As the summer sun intensifies, Optometry Australia is warning Australians to not only slip, slop and slap, but to slide on some sunnies to protect their eyes from the sun's harsh rays.

Because just like our skin, our eyes are susceptible to sunburn. And the effects could seriously upset your summer.

Resident optometrist from Optometry Australia, Luke Arundel, said the eyes are more sensitive than our skin to UV rays and without protection they are at risk of photokeratitis, a painful eye condition that occurs when your eyes are exposed to too much ultraviolet (UV) radiation. It's common, particularly when a person has been unprotected from reflected glare.

"Photokeratitis can occur in one or both eyes simultaneously. Similar to sunburn like that which occurs on your skin, it is not usually noticed until well after the damage has occurred," he said.

"Symptoms include pain, redness, blurriness, tearing, swelling and sensitivity to light."

Mr Arundel also warned the risk to children's eyes from sun exposure is significantly greater than for adults. "We believe that while many parents and schools will not let children go outside without sunscreen or protective sun clothing, they are not putting enough emphasis on sun damage to children's eyes.

"UV radiation from the sun can cause significant damage to a child's eyes and lead to serious eye conditions later in life, so we are urging those who care for children, to work with us to stamp out some of the problems caused by sun exposure.

"Wearing a hat simply doesn't offer enough protection. The simple solution is to always encourage children to wear sunglasses when outdoors. Adults can also become a role model in cutting down sun-related eye conditions by always wearing sunglasses outdoors, year round", Mr Arundel said.

Mr Arundel explained, there are many conditions affecting the eyes that are related to UV exposure such as cataract, macular degeneration, pterygium (a fleshy growth over the front of the eye) and even eye cancers.

"When packing for your summer holiday, sunglasses are an essential item for most Australian adults. It is time that parents ensure that children also have their own pair," Mr Arundel said. Optometry Australia encourages Australians to wear sunglasses all day and all year round.

"Maximal UV exposure for skin is 10 till 2 but because our brow blocks a lot of direct UV rays entering the eyes in the middle of the day, maximal ocular exposure happens when the sun is lower on the horizon, which is why it's still important to wear sunnies in winter.

And it is not only the direct sun on a fine, clear cloudless day that can cause damage. Up to 90% of ultraviolet rays can reach the eye through clouds and light reflected from the ground and off sand, snow or water is also a significant factor," Mr Arundel said.

Optometry Australia suggests the following tips for parents:

- While you don't have to spend a fortune buying sunglasses for yourself or your children, always check the tag as sunglasses sold in Australia must state the level of UV protection.
- Go for sunglasses marked category 2, 3 or 4 to provide good UV protection.
- Novelty or toy sunglasses with coloured lenses in category 0 or 1 don't provide enough protection and should be avoided.
- Polarized lenses are great for cutting reflected glare and are useful for the beach, fishing and driving.
- Sunglasses are also available for those who need prescription lenses and come in tinted, polarized or variable colour (photochromatic) options.
- Close-fitting, wraparound styles and sunglasses with thicker arms help block glare entering the eyes from the side of the head.
- It's never too early for children to wear sunglasses so get them in the habit of doing so while they're young. Sunglasses with an elasticated band around the back can help to keep them in place.
- If older children are having trouble wearing sunglasses, then the next best thing is a broad brimmed hat that provides some shade for the eyes – but note that hats stop only around 50 per cent of UV rays from entering the eyes.
- For young babies, a cover over their pram will help protect their skin and eyes from the sun's rays.
- If in doubt, visit your optometrist for expert advice on caring for your eyes and www.goodvisionforlife.com.au for more tips on keeping your eyes healthy.

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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.