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Stop Your Eyes from Aging This Summer

Only 32 percent of adults consider UV protection an important factor when purchasing sunglasses

(June 1, 2011) – Most Americans know the importance of UV blocking sunscreen to protect their skin from aging and diseases. Unfortunately, according to the recent American Eye-Q® survey, funded by the American Optometric Association (AOA), only 32 percent of Americans understand the same is true when it comes to protecting their eyes from aging and diseases.

“Summer can be a dangerous time for the eyes because people spend so much time outdoors, exposed to the sun,” said Sue Lowe, O.D., an AOA UV protection expert. “Overexposure to ultraviolet rays fast forwards aging of the eyes and increases the risk for serious diseases.”

If the eyes are exposed to excessive amounts of UV radiation over a short period of time, a “sunburn” called photokeratitis can occur. This condition may be painful and include symptoms such as red eyes, a foreign body sensation or gritty feeling in the eyes, extreme sensitivity to light and excessive tearing. Photokeratitis is usually temporary and rarely causes permanent damage. Ongoing exposure to UV radiation, however, can cause serious harm to the eyes and age them prematurely.

Research has shown that exposure to small amounts of UV radiation over a period of many years increases the chance of developing cataracts, macular degeneration – the leading cause of blindness in adults – and eye cancer. Long-term exposure may also cause damage to the retina, a nerve-rich lining of the eye that is used for seeing.

“In addition to sunglasses, certain contact lenses incorporate an ultraviolet blocker in the lens, which helps further reduce exposure to UV light that can eventually cause cataracts and other eye problems,” said Dr. Lowe. “In addition to wearing sunglasses or protective contact lenses, applying UV-blocking sunscreen around the eye area and wearing a hat will further protect the eyes and help prevent premature aging.”

To provide adequate protection for the eyes, the AOA and Colorado Optometric Association recommend sunglasses and protective contact lenses should:

- Block out 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B radiation
- Screen out 75 to 90 percent of visible light
- Sunglasses should be perfectly matched in color and free of distortion and imperfection and have lenses that are gray for proper color recognition

The AOA and Colorado Optometric Association also urge parents to remember to protect infants’ and children’s eyes from the sun at all times. This is particularly important as kids tend to spend more time in the sun than adults.

A good way to monitor eye health, maintain good vision, and keep up-to-date on the latest in UV protection is by scheduling yearly comprehensive eye exams with an eye doctor.



To find an optometrist in your area, or for additional information on how best to protect your eyes from UV radiation, please visit www.AOA.org or www.visioncare.org.

About the survey:

The fifth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From April 14-21, 2010, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,007 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level)

About the American Optometric Association (AOA):

The American Optometric Association represents approximately 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors. Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.

American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor's degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit www.aoa.org.

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