



Health Protection Agency

A Children's Environment and Health Strategy for the UK

Together ABDO, AOP, the College and FODO represent the 10,500 optometrists and over 5,000 dispensing opticians and optical businesses in the UK who provide high quality and accessible eye care services to the whole population.

We have confined our response to those questions which are most relevant to us.

14. Are there any areas that you feel need to be addressed in the UK but aren't highlighted in this strategy? If so please explain.

Although we agree that the areas highlighted in chapter 5 need to be addressed we are particularly concerned with the need to encourage good sun protection behaviour in children and young adults. Early UV exposure can lead to the development of cataracts and may be linked to the incidence of AMD (Age-related Macular Degeneration), which is the leading cause of blindness in the UK. There have been public health campaigns addressing the need to protect children's skin from sun exposure but not enough is being done to protect children's eye health from sun exposure.

A recent study by the College of Optometrists found that when buying sunglasses almost 80% of under 25 year olds focused on fashion and price rather than the level of protection offered by the sunglasses. The World Health Organisation estimates that up to 80% of exposure to UV over a person's lifetime occurs before the age of 18, therefore it is important to make sure that when they are outside, children wear sunglasses or a hat with a brim so that any long-term damage is minimised. This is particularly important with our ageing population, as it is with older age that the conditions linked to UV exposure become apparent.

15 What issues do you feel should be a priority over the next 5 years?

We believe that eye health should be included in future campaigns on sun protection. The effects of UV exposure are cumulative which means that people are often unaware of any long term damage until it is too late.

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