

PRESS RELEASE

20 June 2011

Parents urged to take children for a sight test as part of the 'back to school' routine

As the end of term approaches, the Optical Confederation is highlighting the importance of routine sight tests for young children, with online resource packs available for health professionals and teachers.

1 million children in the UK currently have an undetected vision problem which could affect learning and development in their early years. Whilst over 90% visit a dentist regularly, only 53% have ever had a sight test¹.

Poor eyesight can have a significant effect on children's ability to learn and on their behaviour, yet often goes unrecognised by teachers, parents and by the children themselves. The sooner that vision problems are detected - the better the outcome.

For children and parents a sight test can be a life-changing experience:

"Sophie is now finding her class work easier. Her grades have improved, which is great, so visiting the optician has been a positive experience all round."

Mother of Sophie, age 9

"Wearing glasses has changed Gabriel's life. He's an absolutely different boy now. He has become much more independent since he got his glasses. I'm so glad we didn't leave it any later and I can't thank our optometrist enough."

Mother of Gabriel, age 3

"We must ensure that children don't lose out on a good education because they can't see properly. Including a sight test in the back to school routine is a great way to make sure that a child's vision is not forgotten about. Many childhood eye conditions, such as lazy eye and squint, can be treated if they are picked up early - as the eye and visual system are actively developing during the school years. If vision problems are identified and treated, it can make a difference that lasts a lifetime."

Karen Sparrow, Education Adviser at the Association of Optometrists

A sight test can give every child the ability to see clearly, learn effectively and develop normally. NHS sight tests are free for all children under the age of 16. For more information about children's eye health, visit www.aop.org.uk/childrenseyehealth email childrenseyecare@aop.org.uk or call 020 7202 6659.

Ends

For more information, please contact Anne Grenyer, PR Manager at the Association of Optometrists, annegrenyer@aop.org.uk telephone 020 7401 5316.

Notes to Editors

Childrens' case studies and high resolution images can be forwarded on request.

Children's eye health

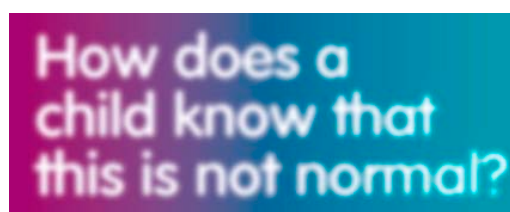
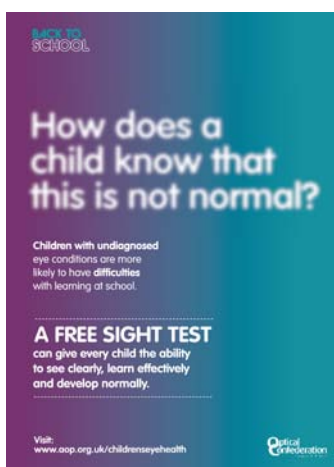
- Up to **1 million** children in the UK currently have an undetected vision problem (Statistics provided by the Eyecare Trust and based on DCSF 2009 School Census 0-12 year olds).
- Over 90% of children visit a dentist regularly, whilst only **53%** of children have ever had an eye examination (Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Survey 2009).
- **84%** of parents agree that improved vision would have a positive impact on their child's performance at school (Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Survey 2009).
- **At least 10% and possibly as many as a third of children in England may be at risk of avoidable and lifelong vision problems going undetected.** Which? research for the 2009/10 school year found that children aged four to five are not having their vision screened, despite this being part of a national programme and expected by the Department of Health. ('Kids' eyesight at risk from poor screening: Up to a third of kids not offered 'expected' tests' Which? report, April 2011 <http://www.which.co.uk/news/2011/04/kids-eyesight-at-risk-from-poor-screening-251738/>)
- NHS sight tests are free for all children and are available at high street opticians and optometrists.
- Children with undiagnosed eye conditions are more likely to have difficulties with learning at school.

Children's eye health campaign

Poor eyesight can have a significant effect on children's ability to learn and on their behaviour, yet often goes unrecognised by teachers, parents and by children themselves. The importance of children's vision and the need for a sight test at a young age was highlighted in 2010 when the Optical Confederation sent out more than 23,000 letters to primary school Headteachers across the UK.

The 2011 campaign has a 'Back to School' theme. We are contacting school nurse managers around the country to encourage them to get involved and pass information on to teachers and parents. A new poster (below) highlights the problem that children may be unaware that their sight is not normal.

Free campaign resources for school nurses, health professionals and teachers to promote children's eye health in schools are available online, visit www.aop.org.uk/childreneyehealth for more information.



Association of Optometrists

The Association of Optometrists (AOP) represents individual optometrists in negotiations with government and other organisations. It also promotes the profession and development of high professional and clinical standards.

The Optical Confederation – The voice of UK optics

The Optical Confederation brings together the five representative bodies within the optical profession to speak with a united voice for patients, professionals and the sector. Launched on 29 April 2010, the Confederation is committed to greater cohesion for the five optical bodies: the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO); The Association of Contact Lens Manufacturers (ACLM); the Association of Optometrists (AOP); the Federation of Manufacturing Opticians (FMO) and the Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians (FODO).

Optometrists are eye health professionals and the services they provide are far wider than a simple test to determine whether spectacles or contact lenses are required to correct vision. A sight test is not just about getting a pair of glasses – it is a vital health check for your eyes.

Dispensing opticians dispense, fit and supply spectacles; some also undergo additional training and certification to fit contact lenses.

A sight test includes (by regulation) a number of other health tests. Many conditions can be detected, including: glaucoma, cataract, diabetes, age-related macular degeneration (the commonest cause of blindness in the UK), some forms of cancer, as well as other conditions not usually associated with eyes, such as high blood pressure and brain tumours.