

Better Access to Quality Eye Care

Nebraska's Doctors of Optometry

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 22, 2014

Media Contact:

Alissa Johnson

(402) 474-7716

noa@assocoffice.net

Popular Halloween Costume Accessory can be Dangerous Buying Contact Lenses without a Prescription is Illegal and Dangerous

LINCOLN, NE – The Nebraska Optometric Association (NOA) today cautioned Nebraskans on the use of decorative contact lenses that have become popular at Halloween to alter the appearance or color of the eyes. These non-corrective, decorative lenses pose the same potential safety and health issues as corrective contact lenses and should only be acquired with a prescription from an eye doctor.

“Decorative contact lenses may seem like a fun accessory, but if you’re not careful, they can cause serious eye and vision problems,” advises **Dr. Darren Wright, NOA President**. “Unfortunately, many consumers mistakenly believe they don’t need a prescription for decorative contact lenses that do not provide vision correction. It’s extremely important that consumers get an eye exam and only wear contact lenses, with or without vision correction, that are properly fitted and prescribed by an eye doctor.”

All contact lenses are classified as medical devices by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and require a valid prescription. Eye doctors are growing increasingly concerned about how accessible decorative contact lenses are and the risks for consumers who purchase them illegally on the Internet, at flea markets, off-the-shelf in retail or drug stores, and even on the street. **The American Optometric Association (AOA)** has collaborated with the FDA and the **Entertainment Industries Council (EIC)** to help educate consumers about the importance of acquired lenses only with a valid prescription from an eye doctor.

According to the AOA’s 2014 American Eye-Q® consumer survey, 11 percent of consumers have worn decorative, non-corrective contact lenses and of those, 53 percent purchased them illegally without a prescription. Wearing illegally purchased decorative contact lenses can result in bacterial infections, allergic reactions, or even significant damage to the eye’s ability to function, which could lead to irreversible sight loss.

-more-

“Contact lenses are among the safest forms of vision correction when used properly,” says Dr. Wright. “A medical eye and vision examination from your optometrist can determine if you are a good candidate for wearing contact lenses, regardless of whether they provide vision correction or not. During the exam, your eye doctor will make sure your lenses fit properly and teach you how to safely care for your lenses.”

NOA eye doctors point to six common mistakes made by patients when it comes to handling contact lenses, including:

1. **Not washing and drying hands.** Washing your hands may seem like common sense, but the American Eye-Q® survey found that 35 percent of contact lens wearers skipped this important step. Drying is also an important part of the process since tap water can contain harmful microorganisms that can be transferred onto the lens and onto the eye.
2. **Wearing lenses longer than recommended.** Many contact lens wearers will try to make their lenses last longer by waiting to change them until the lenses become bothersome. According to the American Eye-Q® survey, 57 percent of contact lens wearers admitted to wearing disposable contact lenses longer than directed. Not following an eye doctor’s recommended changing schedule can cause preventable eye irritation or even lead to permanent eye damage from bacterial infections.
3. **Not replacing contact lens cases regularly.** Eye doctors recommend that lens cases be replaced at least every three months, and cases should be cleaned and disinfected periodically in between. Yet, only 41 percent of contact lens wearers follow this rule.
4. **Sleeping in contacts overnight.** The American Eye-Q® survey revealed 21 percent of contact lens wearers are guilty of this bad habit. Sleeping in contacts puts consumers at risk for an eye infection. Only do so when wearing lenses specifically designed for day and night wear and when closely monitored by your doctor.
Reusing old contact lens solution. Only fresh solution should be used to clean and store contact lenses. Stick to products recommended by your eye doctor to clean and disinfect lenses, and remember, saline solution and rewetting drops are not designed to disinfect lenses.
5. **Wearing contact lenses while swimming or in a hot tub.** More than a quarter (26 percent) of contact lens wearers report swimming in their contact lenses, which can lead to serious sight-threatening eye infections and irritation. According to the FDA and the AOA, contact lenses should not be exposed to any kind of water, including tap water and water in swimming pools, oceans, lakes, hot tubs and showers.

For more information about how to protect yourself against the risks associated with decorative contact lenses visit www.contactlensart.org, and to find additional resources about contact lens hygiene and safety, please visit www.contactlenssafety.org or www.BetterEyecareNebraska.com.