

# Better Access to Quality Eye Care

Nebraska's Doctors of Optometry

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Concern Growing Over Time Kids Spend Indoors on E-Devices New Studies Show Lack of Sunlight Could Cause Eye Problems**

*Children need yearly comprehensive eye exams prior to the start of each school year*

**Lincoln, NE** – With summer winding down and the start of school just a few weeks away, the Nebraska Optometric Association (NOA) is encouraging parents to monitor the amount of time children spend indoors on electronic devices.

Optometrists are closely monitoring new research surrounding the increasing amount of time today's children spend indoors on electronic devices and the decreasing time spent playing outside. New studies suggest a lack of exposure to sunlight could affect the growth and development of the eyes and vision, possibly contributing to an increase in the number of cases of myopia, or nearsightedness, in younger people in recent years.

"A child's eyes are still changing between the ages of 5 and 13 years old," said Dr. Jeff Klein, an NOA member in Norfolk. "Therefore, during this time, the distance between the lens and the retina is also still changing. When the distance between the two lengthens, we see an increase in the instances of nearsightedness. Preliminary studies are now showing that exposure to natural light may play a role in reducing the likelihood of nearsightedness."

It's essential to make comprehensive eye exams a priority each school year to protect children's eye and vision health. The NOA recommends parents take children in for an eye exam by an optometrist soon after six months of age, again by age three and annually thereafter. Through the Pediatric Essential Health Benefit in the Affordable Care Act, parents can take advantage of yearly comprehensive eye exams for children ages 18 and younger.

Digital technology has become an integral part of children's lives both in the classroom and at home, and it's predicted that by 2028 – the year when kids entering kindergarten this fall will graduate high school – many schools will rely heavily on computer simulations for instruction and will even incorporate virtual worlds into curriculums. While advances in technology may help enhance learning, many digital devices are still relatively new and the long-term effects on young eyes are still being determined.

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According to the American Optometric Association's (AOA) 2015 American Eye-Q<sup>®</sup> survey, 41 percent of parents say their kids spend three or more hours per day using digital devices, and 66 percent of kids have their own smartphone or tablet.

"21<sup>st</sup> century children have had access to electronic devices their whole lives," says Dr. Klein. "Since technology use is expected to continue to climb, we need to make sure that children and parents are aware of the visual risks associated with staring at screens for long periods of time and take the proper precautions to help alleviate eye and vision problems."

Parents and caregivers should watch for signs of digital eye strain in children, which can cause burning, itchy or tired eyes, headaches, fatigue, loss of focus, blurred vision, double vision or head and neck pain. When it comes to protecting children's eyes and vision, encourage them to take frequent visual breaks by practicing the 20-20-20 rule: when using technology or doing near work, take a 20-second break, every 20 minutes and view something 20 feet away.

"Comprehensive eye exams are one of the most important investments a parent can make to help maximize their child's education and contribute to their overall health and well-being," added Dr. Klein.

"Eye exams performed by an eye doctor are the only way to diagnose eye and vision diseases and disorders in children. Undiagnosed vision problems can impair learning and can cause vision loss and other issues that significantly impact a child's quality of life."

To find an optometrist in your area, or for additional information on children's vision and the importance of back-to-school eye exams, please visit [www.BetterEyecareNebraska.com](http://www.BetterEyecareNebraska.com)

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***About the Nebraska Optometric Association (NOA):***

The NOA represents over 240 doctors of optometry serving in more than 80 communities throughout the state. Doctors of Optometry (ODs) are the independent primary health care professionals for the eye. Optometrists examine, diagnose, treat, and manage disease, injuries, and disorders of the visual system, the eye, and associated structures as well as identify related systemic conditions affecting the eyes. Association members in Nebraska are also leading providers of pediatric vision care and offer two statewide public service programs to serve children. Learn more about both programs and other valuable eye care information on the Nebraska Optometric Association website at [www.BetterEyecareNebraska.com](http://www.BetterEyecareNebraska.com)