

Better Access to Quality Eye Care

Nebraska's Doctors of Optometry

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Nebraskans urged to consult eye doctor before ordering contacts online

“Some internet-based sellers employ tactics that sidestep federal law”

Lincoln, NE – As a result of changes in the marketplace and complaints, the Nebraska Optometric Association (NOA) is urging Nebraskans to consult their eye doctor before ordering contact lenses online.

According to NOA spokesperson Dr. Chris Wolfe, complaints from doctors of optometry, other eye care professionals and consumers have raised concern that some internet sellers overfill orders, fill expired prescriptions, fail to properly verify prescriptions, or fill orders with lenses other than those that were prescribed, placing patients needlessly at risk.

“Despite the fact that contact lenses are federally regulated medical devices that require a valid prescription from a patient's doctor, some internet-based sellers employ tactics that sidestep federal law designed to keep contact lens wearers safe,” Dr. Wolfe said.

While contact lenses may have similar refractive power, he explained, different brands can result in different effectiveness and cause different eye health concerns for wearers. Physician oversight of these FDA-regulated medical devices is essential.

“Some online retailers send patients lenses that don't match their prescription or advise them to substitute another brand, without notifying the prescribing doctor. In fact, some online retailers not only complete sales based on expired or nearly-expired prescriptions, but encourage this practice, despite the health and safety risks,” he said.

According to a recent consumer survey of contact lens patients who ordered their lenses online:

- 1 in 4 reported receiving a different contact lens brand than prescribed by their doctor without advanced warning;
- 1 in 3 reported an online retailer advised them to substitute a non-prescribed lens due to supply issues; and,
- 1 in 3 reported they purchased contact lenses with an already expired prescription.

These tactics are not new and aren't going unnoticed. Recently, one of the largest online contact lens retailers, 1-800 Contacts, was sued by the FTC over efforts to stifle competition and increase prices. The suit alleged that the company unlawfully used its market power to orchestrate and maintain anti-consumer agreements with rival online contact lens retailers.

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More than 40 million Americans use contact lenses to improve vision; while some adhere to the medical guidelines for wearing contacts, many are breaking the rules and putting their vision at risk.

“Contact lens wearers who don’t follow their optometrist’s recommendations for use and wear can experience symptoms such as blurred or fuzzy vision, red or irritated eyes, pain in and around the eyes or, a more serious condition in which the cornea becomes inflamed, also known as keratitis,” Dr. Wolfe said.

“An eye examination is needed to determine an individual’s suitability for contact lenses. This typically includes a refraction to determine the proper power of the lens and an assessment of the health of the eye. Prescriptions for contact lenses and glasses may be similar, but are not interchangeable,” Dr. Wolfe said.

“Contact lens prescriptions generally expire on a yearly basis, unless otherwise determined by your eye doctor. Seeing your eye doctor regularly for a comprehensive eye exam will not only assess your vision and need for updated prescriptions, but it may also help identify and lead to a diagnosis of other health concerns such as hypertension and diabetes,” Dr. Wolfe said.

Contact your Eye Care Professional with questions about proper lens use and for any other eye health concerns. To learn more about contact lens safety, eye health, or to find a doctor of optometry near you, please visit **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. Learn more at **BetterEyecareNebraska.com***