



Undetected and untreated vision problems impact how children see their world

Checks on vision should be part of routine health care throughout childhood. Discussion of vision screening results, eye examination diagnoses, and vision concerns should be included in all well-child visits.

Annual visits to eye doctors (ophthalmologists and optometrists) and eyeglasses (including replacements if needed) are covered by Mass Health insurance. Private insurance plans provide benefits for eye exams, though not always for eyeglasses.

Go to childrensvisionmassachusetts.org for information about assistance programs

Facts about Children's Vision:

- 1) *Vision disorders are a common condition of childhood; about 10% of preschoolers and 25% of school age children have a vision problem.*
- 2) *Annual vision screenings, comprehensive eye exams as needed, and following prescribed treatment plans will give children a better chance for healthy development and school success.*
- 3) *Children with vision problems may not complain that it is hard to see because they do not know what normal vision is. Vision screenings and eye examinations are often the only way for parents and others to understand how well a child sees.*
- 4) *Many children with vision problems are undiagnosed and untreated; some untreated vision conditions will lead to permanent vision loss.*
- 5) *Children born prematurely, or who have developmental delay or other special needs, are more likely to have vision problems. For these children, a comprehensive eye exam is required.*

You can help:

Join our Facebook CVMA Parent Advocacy Group to learn more.

VISION AND LEARNING: MAKING THE CONNECTION



Sometimes, seeing the world through the eyes of a child isn't easy... ask about vision.



Childrensvisionmassachusetts.org

Our Vision is that all children have the opportunity to develop their best possible vision.

About the Coalition (CVMA):

Children's Vision Massachusetts is a 70 member coalition representing optometry, ophthalmology, nursing, pediatrics, public health, education and families with organizational affiliations including Boston Children's Hospital; Boston Medical Center; New England College of Optometry; MDPH; MA Dept. of EEC; Community Catalyst; and Head Start.

The Coalition's Mission is to build a statewide, systematic approach to vision care for children that is universal, comprehensive, cost effective, collaborative, multidisciplinary, dynamic, sustainable, and evidence based.

Background:

Despite research that reports untreated vision deficits in children are associated with delayed motor, language and social development, and that ***untreated vision deficits interfere with a child's ability to acquire early literacy skills***, there are significant gaps in the pediatric eye care delivery system in Massachusetts. These gaps are especially severe for children living in low income communities, urban areas, and in western Massachusetts and the Cape and Islands. The coalition has responded with legislative action, educational programs, research projects and collaborative efforts with partners such as Boston Children's Hospital, Reach Out and Read, and Partners for a Healthier Community in Springfield.

Problem:

Each year, between 2,000 and 3,000 infants and toddlers are at risk for developing amblyopia (lazy eye), a condition that will result in permanent vision loss if untreated. Recently, a National Eye Institute/National Institutes of Health study group reported that uncorrected farsightedness (hyperopia) in preschool children is associated with significantly worse performance on a test of early literacy. Early detection and treatment of conditions such as amblyopia and significant hyperopia are critical to ensure lifelong vision health and eliminate obstacles to learning for children.

The signs of vision problems are easy to miss: vision screenings and eye exams are critical first steps to treatment. Complaints such as itchy eyes, headaches, blinking, and squinting may mean there is a vision problem.

Or, the signs can be more subtle: children who are frustrated by ordinary activities, have difficulty reading or doing other close work, close or cover one eye, fall frequently, or have a hard time engaging with their peers, may have an undiagnosed vision condition. These behaviors don't always mean there is a vision problem, but a comprehensive eye exam and treatment could be the solution to multiple concerns. In fact, issues that may seem like personality traits or learning difficulties could actually be caused by poor vision.

Solution:

Assuring optimal vision for all children is a solvable problem. We need to work together to close ***the significant gaps in access, resources and awareness*** in the current system of pediatric vision care in Massachusetts. Twelve years ago, the Massachusetts Legislature took steps to address these gaps with the passage and enactment of Ch 181 of the Acts of 2004, *An Act Relative to Eye Examinations for Children*. Now we need to work together to build a public health system that includes a statewide data system for case management and surveillance; an awareness campaign; and targeted outreach.

RESOURCES

Visit <https://childrensvision.preventblindness.org/resources-3> to download resources such as

- Resource Guide: list of MA eye doctors who accept children under 6 years old with Mass Health
- Think of Vision: Guide for Preschool Teachers
- For parents whose child fails screening, what do to! And many more

National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health, <https://nationalcenter.preventblindness.org/programs-and-resources>



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