



Recommendations for When Early Intervention Specialists Should Refer Children to an Eye Doctor for a Comprehensive Eye Examination

Vision is a critical yet often overlooked component of a young child's development – physical, emotional and social. Parents, physicians, nurses, eye doctors and early intervention specialists have a role in assuring that all children are able to develop their optimal vision during the first three years of life. All children must have their vision and eye health assessed by their pediatrician, nurse practitioner, or family physician as part of their newborn physical examination and at every well child visit throughout childhood.

The purpose of vision screening is to identify children who are at risk of a vision problem so that they can be referred for a comprehensive eye exam as soon as possible. Vision screening tools and protocols available to professionals other than pediatricians, nurse practitioners and family physicians to assess the vision and eye health of children below the age of three years are limited. Young children at risk of a vision problem, and therefore requiring a comprehensive eye exam, can be identified by utilizing information about signs, symptoms, and risk factors known to be associated with vision problems.

Signs, symptoms, and risk factors requiring referral to a comprehensive eye exam:

1. Child has signs and symptoms of a vision problem (see other side)
2. Child has one or more of the following conditions:
 - Neurodevelopmental Disorders
 - Prematurity and/or Low Birth Weight
 - Motor abnormalities such as Cerebral Palsy
 - Juvenile Arthritis
 - Down Syndrome
 - Cognitive Impairment
 - Hearing Impairment
 - Speech and Language Delays
 - Autism Spectrum Disorders
 - Sibling with diagnosed vision condition as a young child
 - Parent with history of vision problem as a young child
 - High risk maternal behavior during pregnancy
3. Parent, Early Intervention Specialist, or other provider, is concerned that the child is having difficulty that may be related to vision

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF A VISION PROBLEM:

- Eyelids are red-rimmed, crusted or swollen
- Eyes are watery or red (inflamed)
- Eyes don't line up, one eye appears crossed or looks out
- An eyelid that 'droops', covering the eye even when 'open'
- Rubs his/her eyes a lot
- Tilts his/her head or thrusts head forward
- Holds objects close to eyes
- Blinks more than usual
- Squints or frowns
- Does not maintain eye contact when awake and alert

Many young children with a vision problem have no signs or symptoms.

Formal assessments of vision are important throughout a child's life.

COMMON EYE CONDITIONS IN CHILDREN

Lazy Eye/Amblyopia is a loss of vision **that cannot be corrected by glasses**. Eyes that don't line up, or having one eye that focuses better than the other, can cause amblyopia.

Strabismus is a word for eyes that are not straight or do not line up with each other. If the problem is not treated, it can cause amblyopia.

Refractive Error may create focusing problems at far, near or both and may also cause amblyopia. Refractive error conditions include hyperopia (far-sightedness), myopia (near-sightedness) and astigmatism.

PARENT STORY-Developing Eyes

Erin DiSanto: Impact of her child's eye exam and eyeglasses on Early Intervention

Children's Vision Massachusetts is an eighty member coalition representing ophthalmology, optometry, nursing, pediatrics, public health, family practice, education, and parents. The coalition's mission is to create a systematic approach to children's vision services in Massachusetts to support early detection, diagnosis and treatment of vision problems in children. With good and timely care, most pediatric vision conditions respond to treatment.