



The Canadian
Association of
Optometrists



L'Association
canadienne des
optométristes



For Immediate Release

OTTAWA (October 18, 2013)

A scary fact: Halloween contact lenses can lead to irreversible vision loss

While white irises or cat eye pupils might seem like a cool trick to enhance this year's Halloween costume, it is no treat when serious eye damage occurs. The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO), the Opticians Association of Canada (OAC) and the Canadian Ophthalmological Society (COS) warn that vision loss, sometimes permanent, can result from improper use of cosmetic contact lenses. Decorative (plano) lenses do not correct vision but change the colour and appearance of the eye for cosmetic or theatrical effect. Complications can arise from just one night's use! If you decide to purchase these, we urge you to consult a trained eye care professional first.

"In the past year we have received numerous incident reports from optometrists who have treated patients with serious cases of infection, corneal ulcers, corneal abrasion, allergic reactions and swelling resulting from novelty contact lenses," said Dr. Paul Geneau, President of the Canadian Association of Optometrists. "The scary thing is, corneal ulcers without treatment, can lead to internal eye infection and ultimately scarring of the cornea, resulting in permanent vision loss."

Improper handling including sharing lenses between users, using saliva or tap water to moisten lenses, and sleeping in lenses often lead to infection and complication, but there are other reasons. A recent study in France identified that the health risk for corneal infection is 12.5 times higher using cosmetic lenses, than for prescription contact lenses without oversight by an authorized eye care provider. Individual eyes have their own shape and curvature, and prescription contact lenses accommodate this. Often cosmetic lenses come with only one base curve. If a contact lens doesn't fit properly, it is very easy for it to damage the eye. The eye is the most sensitive organ of the human body. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all contact lens. "We had a case report of a patient who had run out of her usual prescription contact lenses. This patient was properly fit and monitored and well versed with proper handling techniques. On a whim, she ordered cosmetic lenses online and ended up with significant issues with her corneal tissue, accompanied with severe pain," said Dr. Geneau. "Her best corrected vision went from 20/20 to 20/30 in each eye".

"The real danger here is that Canadians have been able to buy decorative or cosmetic lenses without a prescription and proper fitting by an eye health specialist," said Dr. Paul Rafuse, President of the Canadian Ophthalmological Society. "These lenses change the appearance of the eye but can produce corneal ulcers than can quickly lead to permanent loss of vision if left untreated."

Many of the novelty contact lenses are being purchased online, from flea markets, pharmacies, Halloween stores, and mall kiosks. It is wrong for the consumer to assume that all of these unregulated products are being manufactured safely. The quality of the material used to manufacture the lenses can be inferior. In 2008 in Japan, the National Institute of Technology and Evaluation (NITE) reported cases of a colour lens dye leaking directly on to the eye. Since 2009, the US, UK and Japan all require prescriptions for cosmetic contact lenses. It is illegal to sell them without a prescription in these countries.

Canada is behind other countries in regulating cosmetic contact lenses. The Canadian government passed Bill C-313 in December 2012 to classify non-corrective contact lenses as class II medical devices (the same as prescription contact lenses). The new law has not yet come into effect, so most of the cosmetic contact lenses are unlicensed in Canada. The eye care professions in Canada (Optometry, Ophthalmology, and Opticianry) are advocating that the provincial governments move to add non-corrective contact lenses to the regulations that currently exist for prescription contact lenses.



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“Every year, post-Halloween one of our members reports a tragedy due to improper use of decorative contact lenses. Don’t let that tragedy be your vision” warns Dalie Schellen, President of the Opticians Association of Canada.

Vision is our most precious sense. If novelty contact lenses are the finishing touch for your Halloween costume, see a doctor of optometry, an ophthalmologist or a licensed optician first. They will assess your eye health and fit your lenses and provide the training for proper use and handling.

To learn more: www.opto.ca www.cos-sco.ca www.opticians.ca

About the Canadian Association of Optometrists

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is a professional association that represents over 4,900 doctors of optometry in Canada. CAO’s mission is to enhance the quality, availability, and accessibility of eye, vision and related health care; to enhance and promote the independent and ethical decision making of its members; and to assist optometrists in practicing successfully in accordance with the highest standards of patient care.

About the Canadian Ophthalmological Society

The Canadian Ophthalmological Society is the national public authority on eye care in Canada, representing eye physicians and surgeons from every province and territory, and advocating for improved vision care policies and standards in Canada, and around the world.

About the Opticians Association of Canada

The Opticians Association of Canada is a professional association representing Licensed Opticians in Canada. Our mission is to promote Licensed Opticians and the profession; to develop and maintain a professional standard of knowledge and proficiency in our occupational field, and to educate and inform vision care consumers about matters related to their eye health.

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