



HEALTH BULLETIN

Suffolk County Legislator Tom Muratore,
4th Legislative District

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August is Children's Eye Health and Safety Month

As summer winds down and parents scramble to prepare for the new school year, remember that good vision is key to a child's physical development, school success, and well-being. As children grow and change from year to year, so do their eyes and vision. For this reason, the Suffolk County this year designated August as Children's Eye Health and Safety Month. * Schedule an eye exam for your child and have a talk about eye safety.

Babies, children and teenagers have different eye health needs than adults. Some problems that can be treated in babies and young children become irreversible when a child is older. Once a child's best eyesight is established, it's important to protect their sight from injury, and bad habits.

Why is regular vision screening so important?

Good vision is key to a child's physical development, success in school, and overall well-being. The vision system is not fully formed in babies and young children, and equal input from both eyes is necessary for the brain's vision centers to develop normally. If a child's eyes cannot send clear images to the brain, his or her vision may become limited in ways that cannot be corrected later in life. But if problems are detected early, it is usually possible to treat them effectively.

When and how should screening be done?

It is essential to check children's vision when they are first born and again during infancy, preschool and school years. Screening can be performed by a pediatrician, family physician or other properly trained health care provider. It is also often offered at schools, community health centers or community events.

Upon entering school, or whenever a problem is suspected, children's eyes should be screened for visual acuity and alignment. Nearsightedness (myopia) is the most common refractive error in this age group and can be corrected with eyeglasses. If an alignment problem or other eye health issues is suspected, the child should have a comprehensive exam by an ophthalmologist.

Children's Eye Safety

When children participate in sports, recreation, crafts or home projects, it's important for them to know eye safety practices and use protective glasses as appropriate. Each year thousands of children sustain eye damage or even blindness from accidents at home, at play or in the car. More than 90 percent of all eye injuries can be prevented through use of suitable protective eyewear.

Sports deserve particular attention, because eye injuries occur fairly often in children and young adult athletes: between the ages of five and 14, most sports-related injuries in the U.S. occur while playing baseball.

More information about Children's Eye Health can be found on the American Academy of Ophthalmology website www.aao.org/eye-health

* The resolution to designate August as Children's Eye Health and Safety Month was brought forth by Suffolk County Legislator Rudy Sunderman at the request of eight-year old Caitlyn Michiels, who was diagnosed with a rare eye disease and wanted to raise awareness about children's eye health in her community. Cailyn's Resolution passed unanimously in the Legislature and was signed into law by Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone in April 2019.