

## **VISION PROBLEMS**

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**Vision Screening:** Health regulations in the State of Massachusetts require every child to have its vision screened each year. There are a few screening tests that we use on our children. One test has the child either naming or matching a picture of an apple, square, circle, or house held by the screener with a card held on the child's lap. Each eye is checked separately. If the child can identify each picture correctly, she/he passes. If not, the child may be having trouble seeing, and needs to have a complete eye exam by an eye doctor. Another test uses a device that measures whether a child may need eyeglasses. Both screening tests can be performed by either school personnel or by eye doctors. If your child does not pass the vision screening, you will be notified by the health staff of your child's school and your child will need to have a complete eye exam by an eye doctor.

**Eyeglasses:** About 1 in 15 preschool age children have eye problems that require the use of glasses. A few of those children grow out of their need for glasses, but most do not, and will need to wear them for many years to prevent a serious and permanent loss of vision from a lazy eye or crossed eye. Sometimes, this need for glasses runs in families, so if one child needs glasses, others may as well.



**Lazy Eye (Amblyopia):** A lazy eye happens to about 1 in 30 preschool age children and is the most important cause of permanent and serious vision loss in children. It is identified by vision screening, and treated by the use of glasses and patching the child's better seeing eye to force the weaker eye to see better. Children with a lazy eye may have more trouble doing school work, and may not be able to have certain types of jobs as adults.

**Crossed Eye (Strabismus):** Crossed eyes happen as a result of a lazy eye, a need for glasses, or a variety of other health problems. Infants can have a crossed eye, or it can happen later at 3-4 years of age. It often shows up first when a child is very sleepy or when they are sick, and thus parents are often the first to see this problem. If your child should begin to have a crossed eye, you should let your pediatrician know right away, as it may be a sign of serious eye problems and needs treatment as soon as possible.

**Conjunctivitis:** Conjunctivitis is a common inflammation on the front of the eye. It can be caused by an infection from a bacteria, a virus, or by an allergy. It is important to know the cause, because if it is caused by an infection, the child may very easily spread it to other children in the classroom. A child with conjunctivitis caused by an allergy almost always has lots of itching in the eyes, may sneeze a lot, and has it at certain times of the year. It happens more often in spring or fall, when there is lots of pollen from trees and flowers in the air. You should let your pediatrician know about this, as medicines to control the itching and sneezing may be prescribed. A child with conjunctivitis from an allergy can go to school.

Conjunctivitis caused by infection must be reported to your pediatrician and to your child's school. The child should not go to school until cleared by the pediatrician or school health personnel because this kind of infection spreads very easily and quickly to other children. **Conjunctivitis caused by bacteria** often has lots of discharge in the eyes, especially upon waking. The eyes might even be stuck together. You can gently wash the area around the eyes with warm water on a cotton ball. Contact your pediatrician for treatment (often with an antibiotic drop or ointment), and **do not send your child to school**. Be very careful about spreading it to you or others in the house. Wash your hands and have everyone use a separate towel to prevent the spread of the infection. **Viral conjunctivitis** does not have as much discharge but the eyes are red and irritated and often occurs along with a cold or the flu. Contact your pediatrician and **do not send your child to school until cleared by your pediatrician**.