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Healthy Vision Month: Protect Your Sight

[Ann Arbor] - Eye conditions and diseases that can rob your family of their vision could strike people at any age, from newborns to seniors, and at any time.

In honor of May's Healthy Vision Month, Michigan Eye-Bank and Lions of Michigan urge Americans to take care of their eyes and their family's eyes. Pay attention to warning signs and visit an ophthalmologist regularly.

Many people associate eye problems with getting older. While it's true that seniors are at higher risk for a certain eye conditions, some of those problems actually start earlier, and vision loss could be prevented if the problem is caught sooner. Preschoolers, senior citizens and people with diabetes, as well as others with high risk factors for certain eye problems, all need regular eye care. Too often, they don't seek or receive this care, and the result is vision loss.

Infants and toddlers should be screened for common childhood eye problems, such as strabismus (crossed eyes) and amblyopia (lazy eye), during their regular pediatric appointments. Vision testing is recommended for all children starting at around three years of age.

Some warning signs that your child may have vision problems include wandering or crossed eyes, a family history of childhood vision problems, redness, discharge, a disinterest in reading, difficulty viewing distant objects, and squinting or turning the head in an unusual manner while watching TV.

Most children and teenagers have healthy eyes, but they still need to take care of their vision. The major risk to kids and teens is accidental injury. Michigan Eye-Bank and Lions of Michigan recommend protective eyewear for all activities that present a risk of eye injury. An eye doctor can recommend and fit appropriate protective eyewear.

Groups at increased risk for eye disease include African-Americans over age 40 (glaucoma), people with diabetes (diabetic retinopathy), those over age 60 (macular degeneration and cataracts) and those with a family history of eye problems. If you fall into one of these categories, check with your eye doctor to find out how often you need to have a complete eye exam.

In order to promote eye health and the prevention of eye injury and disease, Michigan Eye-Bank offers a free eye disease and injury prevention kit geared towards early elementary school students and their families. To include this in your students' or child's curriculum, contact Michigan Eye-Bank at (800) 247-7250 or visit our Web site, www.michiganeyebank.org.

The Michigan Eye-Bank is a 501(c)(3), independent, not-for-profit organization dedicated to the restoration of sight. It recovers, evaluates and distributes human eye tissue for transplantation. It also supports research into the causes and cures of blinding eye conditions, promotes donation awareness through public and professional education, and provides humanitarian aid to people in need of corneal transplantation throughout the world.