Preventing and Responding to Eye Injuries

Eye injuries in children are very common, and most of these injuries are preventable. Review these tips to learn how to prevent common eye injuries and what to do (and not to do) when a child is injured in the eye.

Eye injury statistics

- Eye injuries are the most common cause of permanent vision loss in young children (0-4 years).
- Playground equipment and hazards in and around the home are often involved in eye injuries in young children.
- Eye injuries in children often occur during play.
- Children account for one-third of all emergency department eye injury visits.

Common Causes of Eye Injuries for Young Children

Eye injuries occur in all parts of the eye: inside the eye, on the eyelid, under the eye, and around the eye. Everyday items like a pencil, a fork, or even a toothbrush can be dangerous if used incorrectly. Running or playing with a sharp object in hand is a common cause of eye injuries. Outside the classroom, power equipment like a lawnmower can send pieces of rocks and twigs flying in the child's direction, putting the face and eyes at risk. Chemicals like cleaners and hand sanitizers can also cause serious eye injuries.

Some common causes of eye injuries in young children include:

- Flying objects like toy rockets, darts, fireworks, bungee cords, and projectiles from toy guns
- Sticks, branches, and stones
- Toys with antennas
- Crayons, pencils, and pens
- Sharp edges of furniture (countertops, tables)
- Kitchen utensils

- Tools and equipment (garden tools, lawn mowers, screwdrivers, nails, and screws)
- Household and classroom cleaners and chemicals (hand sanitizer, bleach, dish detergent, laundry and dishwasher pellets, and nail polish remover)
- Bites or scratches from pets
- Sports (especially basketball, soccer, and baseball)

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Projectile toys are a leading cause of vision loss.

Projectile toys are one of the leading causes of vision-threatening eye injury in young children. Projectile guns, darts, and rockets — even those with foam tips — are not safe for children. These kinds of toys are never appropriate for a Head Start or child care setting. Give families a list of toys that cannot be brought to early childhood programs, including rockets, toy guns, slingshots, water guns, and BB guns. Use the list as an opportunity for educating families about preventing eye injuries.

Preventing Eye Injuries

Head Start staff and families can prevent eye injuries when they understand the causes of eye injuries, supervise children, and set up rules for safe play.

Follow these tips to prevent eye injuries:

- Actively supervise children at all times.
- Give and enforce rules for safely using toys, games, and other items in the classroom or home-based setting.
- Make sure a child never aims a toy at another child.
- Keep toys with small parts and sharp edges away from young children. Toys with edges or points — even toy blocks — need supervision during play.
- Do not allow dangerous toys to be brought into the classroom or out to the playground.
- Follow suggested age guidelines. Remember that age labeling is for ability levels and safety.
- Look for the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) designation on toys.
- Check the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) website for recalls on toys and equipment that aren't safe.

- Have safety goggles for children to wear while playing sports. Starting this habit at a young age will help children continue to wear safety goggles as they get older.
- Encourage wearing sunglasses that block 100% of UV-A and UV-B sunrays when playing outside on sunny days.

Eye Safety and Hand Sanitizer

Some children have been injured by getting alcohol-based hand sanitizer in their eyes. The chemicals can cause serious injury to the eye.

- Safely store sanitizers and all household chemicals away from children.
- Adults should pump hand sanitizer for children. Do not place sanitizer pumps where children can reach them. Do not use stands that pump the sanitizer at a child's eye level.
- Try to prevent children from rubbing their eyes after using hand sanitizer.
- Provide first aid if a child gets hand sanitizer in their eye. Flush the eyes with water and get immediate medical care.

Responding to Eye Injuries

Injuries to the eye can cause permanent vision loss. Act quickly if a child is injured in or near their eye. Learn what caused the injury, apply appropriate first aid, and get immediate medical help.

Administer the proper type of first aid, depending on the cause of injury:

- **Chemical:** Rinse the eye immediately for at least 15 minutes with water OR hold the child's face under a faucet to rinse the eye.

- **Foreign body in the eye:** Allow the eye to tear or rinse out the eye with a commercial eyewash or water to dislodge the particle. Do not try to remove the particle with tweezers.

- **Blow to the eye:** Seek medical care if the child complains of pain, has blurred vision, has blood in the eye, or has any change in the appearance of the eye, including discolored skin around the eye.

- **Cut or puncture to the eye**
  - Do not rinse the eye or try to remove any particles or objects lodged in the eye.
  - Cover the eye with an eye shield or with a paper or plastic foam cup from the brow to the cheekbone. Secure it in place with first-aid tape.
  - Do not allow the child to rub their eye.
  - Do not bandage or place pressure on the eye.
  - Seek immediate medical care.

Keep the following items in your first-aid kit:

- Eye wash for chemical contact with the eyes. This can be a commercial eye wash or saline solution. Water will also work in an emergency, but not for cuts or punctures.

- Small paper or plastic foam cups, and first-aid tape

- Eye shield

- Phone numbers for emergency services, the closest hospital emergency department, Poison Control, and an ophthalmologist or optometrist