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Make Sure Your Baby is Seeing the Most Important Things in His World

InfantSEE® reminds parents about the importance of eye assessments for babies during June's Child Vision Awareness Month

ST. LOUIS, MO, June 2, 2009 – When should a parent schedule a comprehensive eye assessment for a baby? Clinical research has shown that at 6 months, the average baby has reached a number of critical developmental milestones, making this an appropriate age for the first eye and vision assessment.

According to the American Optometric Association's (AOA) 2008 American Eye-Q® survey, which tracks public knowledge and understanding of a wide range of issues related to eye and visual health, only 13 percent of parents make sure their children receive a comprehensive eye assessment in their first year.

It's estimated that one in 10 children is at risk from an undiagnosed eye or vision problem that, if left untreated, can lead to difficulties later in school or even permanent vision loss. Additionally, many children at risk for eye and vision problems are not being identified at an early age, when many of those problems might be prevented or more easily corrected.

Infant eye and vision assessments offer early detection of vision and eye health problems and are critical to a child's development. Through the Optometry's Charity™ - The AOA Foundation's public health program, InfantSEE®, optometrists provide a one-time, comprehensive eye assessment to infants in their first year of life, typically between the ages of 6 and 12 months. These assessments are provided at no-cost to all families, regardless of families' ability to pay or access to insurance coverage.

"Many eye conditions have no visual symptoms so detection by a parent or in a well-baby check-up may be difficult," said Dr. Glen Steele, optometrist and chair of the InfantSEE® committee. "Therefore, an early comprehensive vision assessment is the best way to ensure your baby has healthy eyes and appropriate vision development — now and in the future."

The Assessment

"The good news about a trip to the optometrist is that most babies seem to enjoy the 'games' we use to determine whether their visual development is progressing normally and their eyes are healthy," said Dr. Steele.

Since infants cannot speak, optometrists perform several non-invasive tests that evaluate visual acuity, refraction, motility, alignment, binocularity and overall eye health. As detailed below, these tests can identify signs of vision problems, such as strabismus (crossed-eyes), amblyopia (lazy eye) and diseases of the eye.



- *Visual Acuity* – Traditional vision testing requires the patient to identify letters or symbols on eye charts and entail sustained attention. Since this method is not appropriate for infants and toddlers, tests to assess whether the infant can focus on an object, and follow that object as it moves are performed instead. Tests also determine which objects the baby prefers to look at, and at what distances.
- *Prescription status* – The doctor of optometry uses lenses and light from a small hand-held instrument to assess how the baby’s eye responds to particular targets. Many infants have a mild or moderate degree of nearsightedness, farsightedness or astigmatism that often corrects itself as a baby continues to develop. Although correction may not be needed, careful follow-up is necessary.
- *Eye movement* – Using hands, a light or a toy, the optometrist catches the baby’s attention and observes how the baby follows the movements of the object.
- *Eye Alignment/Binocular Potential* – By covering one eye at a time, the optometrist can study eye muscles and acuity. While identifying strabismus, or crossed-eye, is important, the presence of strabismus may also be an indicator of other visual conditions and systemic diseases.
- *Eye Health* – The optometrist will examine the eye’s structure as well as the eyelids, tear ducts, and other parts of the eye. The doctor will check pupil function and assess visual field. Optometrists may use a hand-held biomicroscope to evaluate the front of the eye. And once the baby’s eyes are dilated, the doctor can examine the inner eye.

Family health history is also an important part of an infant’s eye assessment. An optometrist will want to know about the parents’ vision problems as well as the broader family’s eye and medical history, developmental history and demographic data. Factors that may indicate a baby is at significant risk for visual impairment include:

- Premature birth, low birth weight, or oxygen used following birth
- Family history of eye diseases such as retinoblastoma (eye cancer), congenital cataracts, or metabolic or genetic disease
- Drug or alcohol use during pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted diseases, cytomegalovirus, or HIV
- Difficult or assisted labor, which may be associated with fetal distress or low Apgar scores

In addition to sharing findings with the parents, the doctor of optometry may send summary information to the infant’s pediatrician, family physician or other appropriate practitioners to report and explain any significant condition(s) or concerns diagnosed in the assessment.

To learn more about the InfantSEE® program visit www.InfantSEE.org.



About the survey:

The third annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 17-19, 2008, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,001 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level.)

About InfantSEE®

InfantSEE® is a public health program managed by Optometry's Charity™ — The AOA Foundation. Designed to ensure that eye and vision care become an integral part of infant wellness and improve a child's quality of life, doctors of optometry provide one eye and vision assessment to infants free-of-charge regardless of socioeconomic status. For more information visit infantsee.org.

About the American Optometric Association

American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors, on the frontline of eye health and vision care, who examine, diagnose, treat, and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in an individual's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases. Doctors of optometry have the skills and training to provide more than two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States. The American Optometric Association represents more than 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians in nearly 6,500 communities across the country. For more information, visit www.aoa.org.

About The Vision Care Institute

The Vision Care Institute of Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Inc. is an innovative educational resource created to prepare optometry students for a successful transition into the real world of delivering quality eye care, as well as to assist practicing Eye Care Professionals in the growth and development of their practice. The state-of-the-art facility gives participants a rare opportunity to gain first-hand experience with the latest in vision diagnostic and treatment technologies through hands-on contact lens instruction. Besides clinical training, participants also concentrate on communication skills. The curriculum, taught by leading eye care practitioners from around the country, gives participants the skills and confidence necessary to excel in today's professional practice. The Vision Care Institute has hosted students from all 19 of the schools and colleges of optometry throughout North America at its headquarters in Jacksonville, Florida.

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