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YOUR EYES CAN GET SUNBURNED TOO

Burns to the Surface of the Cornea Are Surprisingly Common...and Painful.

MADISON, WI – As Wisconsinites head outdoors to enjoy the warmer spring and summer months, the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is reminding the public that sun protection should include more than just sunscreen. Just like skin, eyes can also become damaged from ultraviolet (UV) radiation exposure.

While many people understand the importance of protecting their skin from the sun, fewer realize that UV exposure can also lead to painful short-term eye injuries and long-term vision problems. According to the American Optometric Association's American Eye-Q® survey, nearly half of consumers do not check the UV protection level before purchasing sunglasses.

"The long-term effects of UV exposure are a serious concern because they can contribute to conditions such as cataracts, macular degeneration, and abnormal growths on the eye," said 2026 Wisconsin Optometric Association President Dr. Ryan Deibert, an optometrist practicing in the New Berlin area.

Even short periods of intense UV exposure can damage the eyes. A condition known as photokeratitis — often referred to as "sunburn of the eye" — can occur after just a few hours of unprotected exposure to UV rays reflected off surfaces such as water, sand, pavement, or snow.

"Photokeratitis can be extremely uncomfortable," said Dr. Deibert. "Symptoms may include redness, tearing, light sensitivity, eye pain, or a gritty sensation in the eyes. Anyone experiencing these symptoms should contact their optometrist."

Children's Eyes Need Extra Protection

Children are especially vulnerable to UV-related eye damage because the lenses inside their eyes are more transparent than those of adults, allowing more UV radiation to reach the retina.

"When children are outside playing, remembering sunglasses is not always top of mind," explained Dr. Deibert. "Helping children build healthy sun protection habits early can reduce unnecessary UV exposure over their lifetime."

What to Look for in Sunglasses

The WOA encourages consumers to look beyond style when purchasing sunglasses and choose lenses that provide proper protection, including:

- Lenses that block 99–100% of both UV-A and UV-B rays
- Sunglasses that screen out 75–90% of visible light
- Uniformly tinted lenses without inconsistencies or distortions
- Gray-tinted lenses for improved color recognition while driving
- Frames that fit closely to the face to reduce UV exposure from all angles

While some contact lenses offer UV protection, they should still be worn with sunglasses for maximum protection.

The best way to protect vision and monitor overall eye health is through annual comprehensive eye exams. To find a doctor of optometry in your area, visit <http://www.woa-eyes.org/members>.

About the American Eye-Q® survey

The 10th annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From February 19-March 4, 2015, PSB conducted 1,000 online interviews among Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of the U.S. general population (margin of error is plus or minus 3.10 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level).

About the Wisconsin Optometric Association

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 640 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA's website at www.woa-eyes.org.