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AVOID SCARY CONSEQUENCES FROM NON-PRESCRIPTION DECORATIVE CONTACT LENSES

Federal law prohibits consumers from purchasing decorative contact lenses without a doctor's prescription.

MADISON, Wis. – Decorative contact lenses are especially popular in the month of October, when they are often worn to accessorize Halloween costumes. While more people are seeing their eye doctor for a valid prescription when purchasing decorative lenses, just over 1 in 4 consumers still purchases these lenses without a doctor's prescription, according to the American Optometric Association's 10th Annual American Eye-Q® Survey. **In fact, selling decorative contact lenses without a valid prescription from a doctor is in direct violation of federal law.**

The members of the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) want consumers to stay safe this time of year by knowing the health risks associated with wearing decorative contact lenses. Decorative contact lenses are non-corrective strength lenses designed only to change the appearance of the eyes. The poor fitting and/or improper use of such lenses can pose serious risks to consumers' vision and eye health. Consumers purchasing these lenses from untrained individuals may receive poorly fitted or "demo" lenses with little to no instruction in proper lens care and cleaning.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates decorative lenses as medical devices, just as it regulates corrective lenses for vision. Regardless, decorative lenses continue to be illegally marketed and distributed directly to consumers through a variety of sources where they are sold as fashion accessories, including flea markets, the Internet, beauty salons, kiosks in malls, convenience stores and seasonal Halloween shops.

"Decorative contacts are a concern all year long, but Halloween is the time where they are used most frequently to enhance costumes," confirms Dr. Andrew Nahas, Viroqua, WI optometrist and current WOA President. "Consumers who purchase lenses without an exam and prescription from a doctor put themselves at risk of serious bacterial infection or even significant damage to the eye's ability to function, with the potential for irreversible sight loss."

Risks associated with the improper use of decorative contact lenses include conjunctivitis (eye infection), swelling, allergic reactions, and corneal abrasions due to poor lens fit. Additional medical problems may result in a reduction of visual acuity (sight) and contrast sensitivity.

If you must wear decorative contact lenses this time of year, the WOA recommends the following tips for safety and hygiene:

- See an eye doctor for your regularly scheduled eye exam and receive a proper fitting and prescription.
- Always wash your hands before handling contact lenses.
- Carefully and regularly clean contact lenses, as directed by your optometrist.
- Store lenses in the proper lens storage case and replace the case every three months or sooner. Clean the case after each use and keep it open and dry between cleanings.
- Use products recommended by your optometrist to clean and disinfect your lenses. Saline solution and rewetting drops are not designed to disinfect lenses.
- Only fresh solution should be used to clean and store contact lenses. Never re-use old solution. Contact lens solution must be changed according to the manufacturer's recommendations, even if the lenses are not used daily.
- Always follow the recommended contact lens replacement schedule prescribed by your optometrist.
- Remove contact lenses before swimming or entering a hot tub.

About the AOA American Eye-Q® survey

The tenth 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% 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.