

# POMONA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

## Health Services & Programs

### COMMON VISION PROBLEMS

*The most common causes of eye disorders in the young are related to defects in the shape of the eye, or refracting media of the eye.*

**MYOPIA**, or nearsightedness, is the most common childhood disorder which occurs when the eyeball becomes too long from front to back, causing the focusing point within the eye to come before the retina (the area of the eye which receives images formed by the lens). This condition results in the sharp, clear sight of near objects, but an out-of-focus sight of distance objects.

**STRABISMUS**, abnormalities in the coordinated movement of both eyes (such as crossed or turned-out eyes), and **AMBLYOPIA** (lazy eye), are also found to be common disorders among the young. Detection at an early age enhances the chances for successful treatment, either through therapy or optical correction through eyeglasses.

**HYPEROPIA**, or farsightedness, is a condition where the eyeball is too short from front to back, causing the focusing point to be behind the retina. In this case, far away objects may be seen clearly by focusing the eyes, while close objects may be blurred because greater focusing is required.

**ASTIGMATISM**, irregularities in the shape of the cornea or lens, can cause blurred vision in both near and far objects.

Glaucoma, cataracts and diabetic retinopathy head the list of vision threatening diseases in adults, although are a less common cause of vision problems in children.

**GLAUCOMA** accounts for one out of seven cases of blindness in the United States. A disease in which fluid within the eye builds up and causes abnormally high pressures, tension and occasional eye pain. An ophthalmologist should be consulted immediately if any of the following symptoms occur: seeing multi-colored rings or halos around lights at night, losing side vision, experiencing sharp pains in the eye, difficulty in focusing on close work, intermittent blurred or hazy vision, trouble adjusting eyes to darkened rooms, or if new glasses fail to improve sight.

Because the build-up of pressure is gradual, the disease can go undetected. Regularly taking a simple, painless test is the best protection against glaucoma, which if not detected early, could cause irreversible damage to retinal cells and fibers.

Treatment for glaucoma can consist of either prescribed eye drops, which lessen the fluid build-up, or certain drugs, which decrease the fluid production of the eyes.

**CATARACTS**, usually found in persons over age 55, are a clouding of the crystalline lens of the eye, which interferes or blocks the passage of light into the eyes. Cataracts may also result from specific diseases, injury, or exposure to radiation or toxic materials.

Symptoms of cataract build-up include blurred or distorted vision, extreme sensitivity to light (i.e., lights may not seem bright enough to read by, but intense light is dazzling), or seeing spots or ghost images.

Surgical removal of the cloudy lens is the only treatment when the person's vision is sufficiently impaired to interfere with daily activities.

Advanced methods of ophthalmic surgery, made possible by the development of the surgical microscope, allow patients to enter the hospital in the morning, undergo cataract surgery, and return home that same day. Following removal of the lens, an intraocular lens made of a plastic material can be implanted in the patient's eye to restore sight, or special cataract eyeglasses or contact lenses can be worn.

Diabetics need to have their eyes checked regularly since they are susceptible to developing **RETINOPATHY**, a condition that prevents light from reaching the retina due to blood leakage from abnormal new vessels. In severe cases of retinopathy, hemorrhages may fill the large cavity of the eye (the vitreous), or the retina may become detached, both of which lead to total blindness. Although no symptoms may be present in the early stages, warning signs in the more advanced states include blurred vision and variable visual acuity from day to day.

**DETACHED RETINAS** can occur in non-diabetic individuals as well. Symptoms of detached retinas include light flashes, showers of black spots, or blurred side vision. Surgery is imperative to the restoration of sight and must be performed immediately upon discovery of the detachment in order to be completely successful.

A person should be examined whenever he or she feels there is a problem. This includes children, regardless of age. Routine examinations for children when there is no suspicion of a problem should be done at three and a half to four years of age. Since many eye problems develop with age, persons 35 years and older should have check-ups every two years, while persons with a known family history of glaucoma or diabetes should have check-ups annually.

## SECTION 7