Paediatric information

Preventing eye injuries in children – information for parents

There are about 1,000 serious accidental eye injuries in children in the UK every year. Even with the best treatment these injuries can result in poor vision. This leaflet explains what we know about children’s eye injuries, to help parents take reasonable and informed precautions.

Sport-related injuries
Sport and recreational injuries are the biggest single cause of accidental eye injury in children. They are commoner in older children and in boys and can nearly always be prevented by wearing properly fitting protective eyewear. There is often sensible advice on eye safety available from regulatory bodies associated with the sport in question. The table at the end of the leaflet shows which activities carry the greatest risk of eye injury. It is even more important to protect the eyes in such activities if the vision is poor in one eye, or if there has been any previous eye injury or operation.

Toy guns cause a small proportion of all injuries, but the injuries caused are often severe. Particularly hazardous ‘toy’ guns are those which use compressed air to fire a projectile (including air rifles, BB guns and paintball guns). These cause around 100 injuries a year in the UK and in 20 of these; the eye bursts (ruptures). This nearly always results in blindness. It has been shown that most of these injuries occur when children are not under adult supervision.

Chemical injuries
Chemicals in the home can be very harmful to the eye; alkalis are even more dangerous than acids. Toddlers are especially at risk. Particular dangers are kitchen and toilet cleaners, spray oven
cleaners and laundry detergent capsules. These should be kept where children can’t get hold of them, for example in high cupboards or in cupboards with child-proof locks. If your child gets any chemical into the eyes, the most important thing is to immediately wash the eyes out with plenty of water and then seek medical advice.

Fireworks
Firework injuries occur as often as air gun injuries and do even more damage. Half of all injuries result in blindness. Children should never be allowed to purchase fireworks or use them unsupervised. Organised firework events are much safer than those at home.

Driving
Since wearing a seat belt became a legal requirement, we have seen far fewer eye and face injuries, which were previously relatively commonplace. Wearing a seat belt saves lives and vision.

When used appropriately, airbags reduce the risk of death and serious injury (including eye injuries) in adults and older teenagers. However, for younger children the protective value is not as clear and it is possible for children to sustain serious eye injuries from an airbag. Ensure you have your children seated in your car as the car manufacturer advises (you may need to turn off your airbags for your

children or sit them in rear seats). Infants in rear facing child safety seats should never ride in the front seat of a vehicle with a passenger side air bag.

Protective eyewear
For activities which carry a risk of eye injury, such as sports and practical laboratory work, children’s kite-marked sports goggles are the only spectacles which will give true protection to any recognised standards. The lenses cannot be forced through the back of the frame due to a raised rim behind the lens in line with EU standards. Also, the frame is cushioned against the facial bones to prevent frame-related injury. Sports goggles scratch relatively easily (as they must be made with polycarbonate) so need to be checked regularly. Scratched goggles should be replaced to ensure they do not reduce vision.

Levels of risk for sports eye injury without eye protection

High risk sports
- Small fast projectiles, such as air rifles, BB or paintball guns
- Hard projectiles/sticks, such as basketball, rounders and softball
- Cricket
- Lacrosse
- Hockey
- Squash
- Racquetball

Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
City Road, London EC1V 2PD
Phone: 020 7253 3411
www.moorfields.nhs.uk
• Fencing
• Boxing
• Full-contact martial arts
• Intentional injury

Medium risk sports
• Tennis
• Badminton
• Football
• Volleyball
• Water polo
• Fishing
• Golf

Low risk sports
• Swimming
• Diving
• Waterskiing
• Skiing
• Non-contact martial arts
• Wrestling
• Cycling
• Javelin
• Discus

Eye safe sports
• Running
• Gymnastics

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Moorfields Direct telephone helpline
Phone: 020 7566 2345
Monday-Friday, 9am-9pm
Saturday, 9am-5pm
Information and advice on eye conditions and treatments from experienced ophthalmic-trained nurses.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)
Phone: 020 7566 2324 or 020 7566 2325
Email: pals@moorfields.nhs.uk
Moorfields’ PALS team provides confidential advice and support to help you with any concerns you may have about the care we provide, guiding you through the different services available at Moorfields. The PALS team can also advise you on how to make a complaint.

Your right to treatment within 18 weeks
Under the NHS constitution, all patients have the right to begin consultant-led treatment within 18 weeks of being referred by their GP. Moorfields is committed to fulfilling this right, but if you feel that we have failed to do so, please
contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS) who will be able to advise you further (see above). For more information about your rights under the NHS constitution, visit www.nhs.uk/choiceinthenhs.