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Halloween party-goers urged to protect themselves from contact lens horrors

Experts from Moorfields Eye Hospital are urging party-goers planning to wear spooky contact lenses this Halloween to buy and wear them safely. Cosmetic contact lenses can cause an increase in A&E visits around the Halloween season, with under-16s among those affected.

Cosmetic contact lenses are often sold illegally on market stalls, joke shops and websites¹. These unauthorised outlets rarely provide adequate advice about how to wear and care for contact lenses safely.

By law, cosmetic contact lenses should only be supplied under the supervision of a registered optician or doctor who will check the lenses will not cause damage and provide aftercare advice to reduce the risk of infection.

Vicky McDermott, Chief Executive of the General Optical Council, said:

“When worn safely, the risks associated with cosmetic contact lenses are low. However, when lenses are sold illegally, wearers are denied important safety checks and advice, putting them at risk of serious damage to their eyes. Party-goers can better protect their sight by buying their lenses from a qualified professional.”

Mr Badrul Hussain, Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon at Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, said:

¹ Of people who have ever bought cosmetic contact lenses: 39% have bought them from an internet supplier, 34% have bought them from a fancy dress/joke shop, 12% have bought them from a hairdressers and 41% have bought them from their regular optician. Source: BMG Research GOC 2015 Contact Lenses Survey ([link to research](#))

“Each year we treat patients, including children under 16, who have developed eye conditions after wearing cosmetic contact lenses. There can be an increase in these problems in the period around Halloween. Some of the cases we see, like patients sharing lenses with friends, wearing the same pair year after year well past the expiry date, and storing them in tap water, have devastating effects.

“Most of the patients haven’t been shown how to look after their cosmetic lenses or their eyes properly. Not knowing the basics of using contact lenses safely can put you at higher risk of developing painful eye injuries, infections and in the worst cases, risk of permanent sight loss.

“The cornea, the clear window at the front of the eye, is delicate and can be scratched easily by inexperienced contact lens wearers. This can expose the eye to organisms that can cause nasty infections, which in extreme cases can result in permanently impaired, or loss of, vision.”

Advice for anyone planning to wear cosmetic contact lenses this Halloween is:

- Make sure a registered optician checks the lenses fit safely
- Always thoroughly wash and dry your hands before touching your eye
- Don’t sleep in your contact lenses
- Never let other people try on your contact lenses
- Never let lenses come into contact with water, such as in the shower, bath, hot tub, sauna or swimming pool

For further information about how to wear contact lenses safely, visit

www.loveyourlenses.com/how-to-love-your-lenses/

ENDS

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Notes for editors

An example of how the Trading Standards in Bridgend, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan is working with retailers to improve legal compliance around cosmetic contact lens sales.

“In 2016 Shared Regulatory Services of Bridgend, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Trading Standards Service successfully prosecuted two Cardiff based traders for selling zero powered contact lenses that were not sold in compliance with section 27(1) of the Opticians Act 1989 (As amended) in that neither a registered medical practitioner, a registered optometrist or a registered dispensing optician was present at the time of the sale of the lenses to trading standards officers carrying out test purchases.

“The prosecutions came about as a result of a complaint from a member of the public that had purchased the product for a Halloween fancy dress party and contracted a serious eye infection that required hospital treatment.

“This year all premises in Bridgend, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan selling zero powered contact lenses have been advised by trading standards not to sell the product unless a registered medical practitioner, a registered optometrist or a registered dispensing optician is on the premises to supervise the sale. Any premises that have received advice found to be in breach of the legislation will be investigated and formal action may be taken against them.”

About the General Optical Council:

The GOC is the regulator for the optical professions in the UK. Its purpose is to protect the public by promoting high standards of education, conduct and performance amongst opticians. The Council currently registers around 29,000 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses. For more information visit, www.optical.org.

About Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust:

Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is one of the world's leading eye hospitals, providing expertise in clinical care, research and education. It has provided excellence in eye care for more than 200 years and continues to be at the forefront of new breakthroughs and developments. In 2016/17 Moorfields saw more than half a million patients in their outpatient services and provided care to 102,000 people in their specialist A&E department. For more information, visit www.moorfields.nhs.uk.