



Are your child's eyes working properly?

Dr Paul Martiquet, Medical Health Officer



Vision problems can occur at any age, and if identified early there is a

very good chance they can be corrected. The goal is to find the problem while the eye is still developing.

A newborn is able to see, but they have to learn how to use their eyes. They have to learn how to focus, track objects, and to use both eyes together. Babies learn eye-hand coordination and how close or far things are. By age one, a baby has “adult-like” eyesight. They are able to judge distance, can grasp and throw things.

Children's vision continues to develop until about age eight. After that, eyesight is fully developed and cannot be easily corrected. Some vision problems that children may have are crossed eyes (strabismus) the eye muscles point one or both eyes in the wrong direction, lazy eye (amblyopia) where the vision in one eye is weaker than the other, myopia (near-sightedness), hyperopia (far-sightedness). Some of these vision problems should be treated early to prevent permanent vision loss.

How can you tell if your child might be having vision problems? There are signs and symptoms to watch for; squinting or rubbing their eyes a lot; sensitivity to light; drooping upper eyelid is another sign, as is covering or closing one eye to see; holding objects too close; avoiding books and television; bumping into things.

Vision problems often run in families. If there is a family history or your child shows any of the signs

or symptoms make sure your child gets examined by your family doctor or eye doctor by 3-years of age or earlier.

Healthy eyes are important for learning. Because of the importance of early identification, in 2007, Vancouver Coastal Health provided vision screening for all children in kindergarten and in 2009 the screening was extended to include all children 3 years of age. The screening is free and your child does not have to read to be screened. This screening does not replace your regular eye examination by your eye doctor. Some families are eligible for assistance to buy eyeglasses through the BC Healthy Kids Program (1.866.866.0800).

The three-year-old screening takes place between February and June at licensed childcare and preschool facilities and at community locations like StrongStart, some Early Years and Kindergarten health fairs. To have your three-year-old screened

outside of these locations or for more information, contact the Screener in your area. Sunshine Coast, Shelly McAuley, 604.886.5615; Powell River Shannon Alsop, 604.485.3310; and Sea-to-Sky Claudette Jonzon, 604.892.2293; Bella Coola Pat Lenci, 250.799.5722.

Good eyesight is a valuable tool for learning and if problems can be discovered early on, that good vision can be made to happen. Early screening means giving your child the best chance for good sight for the rest of their lives.

Healthy eyes are important for learning.