

CENTRAL CONNECTICUT HEALTH DISTRICT

SERVING THE TOWNS OF BERLIN, ROCKY HILL AND WETHERSFIELD

Central Office:
505 Silas Deane Highway
Wethersfield, CT 06109
Phone (860) 721-2822 Fax (860) 721-2823

Berlin Office:
240 Kensington Road
Berlin, CT 06037
Phone (860) 828-7017 Fax (860) 828-9248
www.ccthd.org

Rocky Hill Office:
761 Old Main Street
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
Phone (860) 258-2770 Fax: (860) 258-2767

Date: June 23, 2004

Protect Your Eyes At Work and At Play

Now that summer has arrived, many will celebrate Independence Day with fireworks, household seasonal cleaning will be tackled, and recreational pursuits such as fishing, baseball, and just going for a ride will be enjoyed. Of course, most of us will have to fit these activities around our work schedule. But as we engage in both recreational and work related endeavors, safety should never take a back seat.

July has been designated National Eye Injury Prevention Month, and this is an optimal time to consider eye safety. Unlike other types of vision problems, eye injury is unique in that 90% of the cases could be prevented through the use of common sense and simple safety measures. Each year, nearly 1 million eye injuries occur, making accidental eye injury one of the leading causes of visual impairment in the United States.

As the nation's birthday approaches each year, public and private fireworks displays are used to commemorate the occasion. While fireworks injuries typically are rare at public shows run by professionals, many individuals opt to have their own celebrations. The result is over 2000 eye injuries every year; many result in loss of vision, and sometimes the loss of an eye.

According to the U.S. Eye Registry, approximately 43% of eye injuries occur in the home. Chemicals used for cleaning, pest control, and motor vehicles can be sprayed or splashed accidentally into the eye. Machinery such as lawn mowers and weed whackers often kick up rocks and debris that fly into the eye. Battery acid, sparks, and other forms of debris may injure the eye when working on an automobile. Keeping a pair of tight fitting goggles in the home and car, and remembering to use them, is an inexpensive and simple way to avoid many eye injuries.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology reports that more than 2000 eye injuries occur each day, with 1000 of these injuries occurring in the workplace. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, almost 70% of these accidents involved falling or flying objects or sparks hitting the eye. Although the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has set standards requiring employers to provide workers with appropriate eye protection, about 3 of every 5 workplace eye injuries resulted from employees either not wearing protective eyewear, or wearing the wrong type for the job. The financial cost alone from these injuries is estimated to be \$300 million per year in lost production time, medical expenses, and workers' compensation.

Even when relaxing, eye injuries can occur. Although rare, fishhooks in the eye do occur. Children suffer permanent injury if sitting in the front seat when air bags deploy. The more adventurous among us could suffer damage from recoiling bungee cords that require surgery and result in loss of vision. At a minimum, all activities engaged in by children and young adults need to be supervised, and infants and small children should always ride in the back seat with a proper restraint system in use.

Eye injuries can occur when engaging in nearly any sport, but with more daylight, warm weather, and often more leisure time, a greater number of people are likely to participate in sports during the summer

months. About 40,000 sports-related eye injuries occur each year in this country, and many result in permanent loss of vision. However, if appropriate protective gear is worn, most of these injuries can be prevented. Facemasks, protective goggles, and eye shields designed with a particular sport in mind should be used regularly. Since there is a great deal of variety in eye protection and the various brands, a serious athlete would be wise to have the eye protection fitted by an eye doctor, optician, or athletic trainer to provide maximum protection.

When an eye injury occurs, it is imperative that appropriate medical attention is sought immediately. Also, practice the following measures to avoid making the injury worse:

1. Do not rub the injured eye.
2. Tape a shield or the bottom of a foam cup to the brow, cheekbone, and bridge of the nose to protect the eye from pressure or rubbing.
3. Do not apply ointment or medication without instruction from the doctor.
4. Apply a bandage without pressure to treat cuts or punctures. Do not wash the eye or attempt to remove any foreign object stuck in the eye.
5. In the event of a chemical burn, flush the eye immediately with clean water.
6. Apply a cold compress to reduce pain and swelling, but do not apply pressure to an eye that has been struck.
7. Use an eyewash to rinse out sand or other debris, and do not rub.
8. Avoid giving aspirin, ibuprofen, or other anti-inflammatory drugs.

In all cases, a trip to the emergency room or a call to the physician is strongly recommended.

For additional information about eye injury, contact the American Academy of Ophthalmology at 1-800-561-8500 (www.aaopt.org), Federal Occupational Health at 1-800-457-9808 (www.foh.dhhs.gov), or Prevent Blindness America at 1-800-331-2020 (www.preventblindness.org.) The Central Connecticut Health District can be reached at 860-721-2822 (www.ccthd.org) for more information about eye injury or any other public health topic.