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## **Scare Others (Not Yourself) with Decorative Contact Lenses**

Ask any child what their two favorite holidays are, and the reply is likely to be Christmas and Halloween. Ask an adult the same question, and there is a good chance the answer will be the same. A Consumer Survey conducted last year by the world's largest retail trade association, the National Retail Foundation, revealed 34% of adults will dress in a costume on Halloween. Among young adults (18-24), nearly 2/3 intend to dress up.

For both adults and children, safety recommendations include opting for make-up and hats instead of wearing masks. But adults often will take this idea one step further by adding decorative contact lenses to complete their costume. And there are many to choose from, including contacts that cover just the pupil and contacts that cover the entire white part of the eye. An array of solid colors and a variety of designs are available to complete any costume.

However, even though decorative contacts, also known as Plano or non-corrective lenses, can be fun, they are still classified as medical devices that are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. The FDA warns that decorative lenses carry several risks, and should only be worn after an eye health professional has been consulted. Decorative lenses, like corrective lenses, require specific care and must fit properly to avoid damaging the eye. An eye care professional will measure the eye and give instruction on the proper care and use of the lenses, and will write a prescription for the lenses.

When Congress amended the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act in 2005, it became illegal for retail outlets to sell decorative lenses to people who do not have a valid prescription for the lenses. Once a valid prescription is obtained from the eye care professional, however, an individual may legally purchase the lenses from stores, the Internet, mail order companies, or over the telephone.

Once a person has a prescription for the decorative lenses, they must heed the instructions of the eye care professional regarding how to properly wear and store them. Like corrective lenses, decorative lenses carry certain risks to the eyes. These risks include eye infections (conjunctivitis), swelling of the cornea, allergic reaction, reduced visual acuity, and abrasion of the cornea. The FDA also has received reports of corneal ulcers associated with the use of decorative lenses, particularly when the lenses are worn for longer periods of time than recommended. Without treatment, corneal ulcers can become infected, causing scarring and leading to vision impairment and even blindness and loss of the eye.

Decorative lenses should not be worn for prolonged periods of time, should be removed before going to sleep, and never should be shared with another person. They must be clean, and should be disinfected before and after each use.

When considering getting decorative lenses, it is important to

- Schedule an eye examination with a licensed eye care professional.
- Obtain a prescription that includes the lens dimensions and the brand.

- Purchase the lenses only from a vendor that requires a prescription.
- Follow all instructions regarding cleaning, disinfecting, and wearing the lenses.
- Schedule follow-up eye exams with your eye care professional.

Even though it is illegal to sell decorative contact lenses without a prescription, the FDA often receives reports of the marketing and distribution of lenses without prescriptions. While it is not illegal for the consumer to purchase these products, there is no guarantee the lenses have been made under sterile conditions. Further, without the correct fit and instructions for the care and use of these lenses, the consumer is risking his or her eyesight by purchasing them. Anyone who discovers retailers selling decorative lenses without requiring a valid prescription, or who has other problems or complaints, may call the FDA's voluntary reporting program, MedWatch, at 1-800-FDA-1088. MedWatch also may be accessed online at [www.fda.gov/medwatch](http://www.fda.gov/medwatch).

To learn more about decorative contact lenses, visit the FDA's website at [www.fda.gov/cdrh/contactlenses/types.html#plano](http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/contactlenses/types.html#plano). For further information about Halloween safety, contact Prevent Blindness America at [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org), or the American Academy of Pediatrics at [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org) (847-434-4000). Additional information about this or other public health concerns is available at the Central Connecticut Health District, serving the towns of Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill, and Wethersfield, at [www.ccthd.org](http://www.ccthd.org) (860-721-2822).