

American Academy Of Ophthalmology Warns Parents And Teens About Buying Decorative Contact Lenses Without A Prescription

(NAPSA)—Obtaining decorative lenses including colored contacts and novelty or costume lenses without a prescription is dangerous. And circle lenses, which are one of the latest fads with teenage girls, are not FDA approved and may cause serious eye-health risks.

Websites often advertise decorative contacts as if they were cosmetics, fashion accessories or toys. With whimsical, playful packaging and names like Dolly Eyes, their targets are often teens and young adults.

For this reason, the American Academy of Ophthalmology is warning parents and teens that purchasing any contact lenses without an eye examination and a prescription from an eye care professional such as an ophthalmologist—a medical eye doctor—can cause serious eye disorders and infections, which may lead to blindness. Even if someone has perfect vision, he or she needs to get an eye exam and a prescription from an eye care professional in order to wear any kind of contact lens.

“Most people believe that decorative lenses do not require the same level of care or consideration as a standard contact lens because they can be purchased over the counter or on the Internet. This is far from the truth,” says Thomas Steinemann, M.D., professor of ophthalmology at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland and a clinical correspondent for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. “In fact, permanent eye damage can result from buying contacts without a prescription. Many of the lenses found online or in beauty salons, novelty shops or in pop-up Halloween stores are not FDA approved and are being sold



Websites often advertise decorative contact lenses as if they were cosmetics, fashion accessories or toys, but contacts are medical devices.

illegally. All contact lenses are medical devices that require a prescription and proper fitting by an eye care professional.”

In 2005, a federal law was passed that classified all contact lenses as medical devices and restricted their distribution to licensed eye care professionals. Illegal sale of contacts can result in civil penalties of up to \$11,000 per violation. Consumers should only buy decorative contact lenses from an eye care professional or a seller who asks for a prescription.

Laura Butler of Parkersburg, W.V., purchased decorative lenses from a souvenir shop while on vacation. “I was unaware of the dangers involved in buying these lenses over the counter or of the harm that could result,” Butler said. “After wearing the contacts for a total of 10 hours, I experienced extreme pain in both eyes. Because I had not been properly fitted by an eye care professional, the lenses stuck to my eyes like a suction cup. Removing them resulted in a corneal abrasion and a painful infection. I was in severe

pain and on medication for four weeks and couldn’t see well enough to drive for eight weeks. I now live with a corneal scar, vision damage and a drooping eyelid. I want to share my story in the hopes that others will not have to live through this nightmare.”

To protect the eyes, an eye care professional measures each eye in order to properly fit contacts for the patient. There is no such thing as a “one size fits all” contact lens. Lenses that are not properly fitted may scratch the eye or cause blood vessels to grow into the cornea. Additionally, the eye care professional instructs the patient on appropriate contact lens care. Lenses that are not cleaned and disinfected increase the risk of eye infection. Not all patients are good candidates for contacts (prescription or decorative lenses). Patients who have frequent eye infections, severe allergies, dry eye that is resistant to treatment, a very dusty work environment, or an inability to handle and care for the lenses may not be suitable candidates for contacts. An eye care professional can assist in helping patients make a decision that is right for them.

For more information on the safe wearing of decorative lenses as well as regular contacts, visit www.geteyesmart.org.

About EyeSmart:

EyeSmart®, the American Academy of Ophthalmology’s public education program, works to educate the public about the importance of eye health and to empower patients to preserve their healthy vision by providing the most trusted and medically accurate information about eye diseases, conditions and injuries.