

OPTICIANS COUNCIL OF CANADA WARNS AGAINST PURCHASING COSMETIC CONTACT LENSES FROM A NON-LICENSED PROFESSIONAL.

When it comes to Halloween safety, parents may consider their kids' costumes and whether to attach reflectors, checking candy is appropriately wrapped and safe to eat, but what about their eyes? All consumers should know that it's and increase of eye injuries has been reported around Halloween.

Common areas of eye injuries at Halloween are makeup related, costume related and contact lens related. Although non-prescription cosmetic contact lenses appear to be innocuous and amusing, they carry the same risk factors as a prescription contact lens if the individual is not properly fitted and educated on contact lens wear and maintenance of ocular health by a licensed eye care professional. The Alberta Opticians Association won an injunction against London Drugs, a chain of pharmacies operating in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, from selling these lenses in their Alberta outlets in 2003.

Contact lenses are not 'one size fits all' and there is a whole range of ocular problems associated with improperly fitting lenses. Based on many cases reported by eye care professionals, severe eye infections have been reported in as little as 24 hours of wear time. Consumers need to know that there is a great deal of maturity, responsibility and awareness required with contact lens wear whether they are used for vision correction or not.

Tips for parents and consumers regarding non-prescription cosmetic contact lenses for Halloween:

- Seek an eye care professional who will provide you with a proper contact lens assessment. When wearing contact lenses that do not fit properly, there is large scope of potential eye problems that can arise ranging from mild redness, irritation, blurred vision, all the way up to severe corneal ulcers.
- Never wear lenses that are torn or discoloured. Contact lenses need to be inspected to make sure that they are safe to wear. Cosmetic contact lenses purchased from a non-regulated source could be defective, used, expired or perhaps not even approved in Canada or the United-States.
- Never share lenses with others. Swapping contact lenses significantly increases the risk of lens contamination and the spread of infection. Moreover, individuals who have not been properly instructed in contact lens care by a licensed eye care professional may be unknowing of the appropriate lens care procedures and lens care products available on the market. Certain contact lens cleaning solutions could be potentially hazardous to the eye if used improperly. Some individuals have even reported using human saliva to wet and sometimes clean contact lenses. Although saliva may seem harmless, it can carry large amounts of bacteria which could damage the eye in as little as 24 to 48 hours.
- Do not sleep in contact lenses unless you have been provided with an appropriate extended wear lens by a licensed eye care professional. Overwearing contact lenses can lead to oxygen deprivation to the eye which can generate corneal ulcers that could result in permanent vision impairment.

Beyond any doubt, improper use of non-prescription cosmetic contact lenses can be detrimental to your vision, and in some cases result in permanent vision loss. Cosmetic contact lenses can be fun and entertaining provided they are procured through a regulated eye care professional that will ensure your eyes stay healthy and protected.