

Screenings vs Exams

Vision screening by a pediatrician or at preschool is not the same as a comprehensive eye and vision exam by an optometrist. In fact, screening may give parents a false assurance because it might only gauge one or two vision areas.

A screening is designed to detect major visual problems and determine if an immediate need exists for a comprehensive vision exam. All children should have regular comprehensive vision exams — the earlier the better.

Good vision is more than 20/20 eyesight. Critical skills are required for satisfactory vision: eye teaming, clear and sustained near vision, tracking, focusing, and accurate hand/eye coordination.

A child should have a thorough eye exam by age 3. (A child need not know the alphabet or how to read.) Proper vision development and absence of eye disease will be verified. If necessary, the optometrist will prescribe eyeglasses or vision therapy. Early detection is vital!

Frequency of Exams

The American Optometric Association recommends vision exams for children at:

- 6 months
- 3 years
- Before entering kindergarten (Illinois)
- Every 2 years thereafter, if no vision problems

An appropriate schedule will be recommended by the optometrist for high-risk children.

Visual abilities are developed during preschool years that a child will need in school and throughout life.

85% of a child's learning is sight related.

Exams are critical! Screenings miss 60% of children's vision problems.



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Eye Problems

Eye problems are more likely in some children:

- Premature birth
- Eye injury
- Family history of vision challenges
 - Childhood cataracts
 - Childhood glaucoma
 - Lazy eye (Amblyopia)
 - Misaligned eyes
 - Eye tumor



Other signs of eye trouble:

- Eyes do not line up; one eye appears crossed or is looking out
- Red-rimmed, crusted, or swollen eyelids
- Watery or red/inflamed eyes

Does your child ...

- rub her eyes frequently?
- close or cover one eye?
- tilt her head or thrust her head forward?
- have difficulty reading, doing close work, or hold objects close to her eyes?
- blink an unusual amount or get irritated doing close work?
- squint or frown?

Your child says she ...

- has blurred or double vision.
- cannot see well.
- is dizzy or has headaches or nausea doing close work.
- has itchy, burning, or scratchy eyes.

If any of those symptoms are evident, have the child's vision examined by an optometrist! Remember, early detection is critical.

Infant Vision (0 - 24 months)

How infants and children learn to see is immensely affected by healthy eyes and good vision. Eye and vision problems might cause delays in development. Early detection of eye health and vision problems is critical so infants have the opportunity to develop the visual capabilities fundamental to growing and learning. Although eye and vision problems are rare in children, parents should be attuned to signs and symptoms referenced in "Eye Problems."

Preschool Vision (2 - 5 years)

Parents need to be alert for vision problems such as lazy eye or crossed eyes during this period. Crossed eyes, or strabismus, involve one or both eyes turning inward or outward. Lazy eye (amblyopia) is a lack of clear vision in one eye that cannot be fully corrected with glasses. It often occurs from crossed eyes and might appear without recognizable signs.

Watch children for indication of any developmental delays. Those delays — difficulty recognizing colors, shapes, letters, and numbers — could be a sign of a vision problem.

School-Age Vision (6 - 18 years)

Learning challenges such as hyperactivity and distractibility are many times labeled as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). It might be the case for those children that vision problems are the root issue. Undetected and untreated vision problems often manifest nearly identical symptoms as ADHD. It is likely that some children with treatable, correctable vision issues are categorized as "ADHD" when a thorough eye exam can pinpoint a vision problem.

Despite the age group, please remember that early detection is critical.

Illinois requires a vision exam before kindergarten.

Good Eye Health, Good Vision — Start Early!

A lifetime of good vision is best achieved by starting eye exams early. Other ways parents might foster development of a child's visual skills:

- Play catch
- Read aloud to the child and let her see what is being read
- Finger painting
- Hand-eye coordination such as building blocks or puzzles
- Memory games
- Coloring, cutting, pasting
- Bike riding, swinging, rolling
- Playing with other children

Healthy habits lead to healthy eyes. Visit your Vision Care doctor regularly for eye exams.

