

The Medical Minute: July is eye injury prevention month

July 8 2011, By Amanda Ely



A Penn State tree surgeon wears protective glasses while he prunes some branches in a tree. Credit:

Summer is here and from lawn care and household projects to summer sports, there are plenty of things we find to keep ourselves busy during these hot months. And the best thing about July ... the fireworks! But before beginning any of these activities, does it ever cross your mind to put on your sun or safety glasses?

Did you know that the American Academy of Ophthalmology estimates that more than two-million [eye injuries](#) occur each year in the United States and that 45 percent of these injuries happen in the home, with another 40 percent being coming from sports or recreational activities? And of all these injuries, 90 percent are preventable. Yet only 35 percent of those who experienced an eye injury were wearing glasses, with only

about 5 percent wearing glasses specifically designed for safety.

The month of July is an especially important time to remind not only ourselves but our children to wear eye protection, as there are approximately 2,000 firework-related eye injuries each year, most resulting in permanent vision loss. Fifty percent of these injuries occur in children younger than 15 years old.

It is for this reason that the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the American Society of Ocular Trauma recommend that every household have at least one pair of American National Standards Institute (ANSI)-approved protective eyewear to be worn when participating in any activity that could create a risk for an eye injury, including the use of hazardous chemicals, flying debris or projectiles to both the participant and any bystander. It is recommended that this protective eyewear meet the ANSI Z87.1 safety standard, which means the glasses, goggles or face shield you buy should have "ANSI Z87.1" marked on the lens or frame. ANSI-approved protective eyewear can be easily purchased from most hardware stores nationwide.

The American Society for Testing Materials has also set standards for protective eyewear for various sporting activities. For more information, visit the American Academy of Ophthalmology's website at www.geteyesmart.org and click on Living EyeSmart, then Preventing Eye Injuries. Information for occupational protective eyewear safety standards determined by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) can be found at your company's human resources department.

Aside from blunt injury to the eye, UV radiation during the summer months is also three times higher than during the winter. Therefore UV-blocking sunglasses also should be at the top of your eye safety list. Not only is UV radiation the leading cause of skin cancer, but it also can

increase your risk of eye disease such as:

- Eye-related cancers
- Cataracts
- Age-related macular degeneration, the leading cause of vision loss in those aged 65 years or older
- Photokeratitis, more commonly called “snow blindness”, which is like a “sunburn” to the cornea caused by intense exposure to UV radiation from a day at the beach without sunglasses; reflections off of snow, water, or concrete; or exposure to artificial light sources such as tanning beds
- Pinguecula or pterygium, which are abnormal usually noncancerous growths on the [eye](#) itself, that may grow over the cornea requiring surgery.

The Environmental Protection Agency believes the greatest amount of UV protection is achieved with a combination of sunglasses that block 99–100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B rays; a wide-brimmed hat; and for those who wear contact lenses, UV-blocking contacts.

So do yourself, and your eyes, a service this summer and invest in a pair of protective eyewear and UV protective sunglasses. Such a small investment can help to prevent 90 percent of all eye-related injuries and help to ensure you maintain the perfect view of those summer days and July fireworks!

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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