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Eye specialists warn of possible eye injuries due to corks rocketing from pressurized bottles

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Practical advice to reduce the risk of champagne cork related eye injuries. Credit: *BMJ* (2023). DOI: 10.1136/bmj.p2520

A small team of eye specialists from the University of Cambridge, the University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center, University College Dublin School of Medicine and Texas A&M College of Medicine is warning of possible eye injuries as many bottles of champagne are opened over the holiday season. In their project, reported in the *British Medical Journal* (*BMJ*) the group studied available literature describing eye injuries that can result from corks moving at high speeds.

Anecdotal and medical evidence has shown that corks flying through the air after being extracted from pressurized bottles can result in a variety

of injuries, mostly minor. But they can also result in major injuries when they strike someone in the eye. The research team found that such collisions can result in injuries such as anterior chamber hemorrhage, or hyphema, in which blood pools in the anterior chamber of the eye. Another possibility is traumatic retinopathy. Such injuries are serious and can sometimes lead to permanent loss of vision.

The researchers also found that blindness resulting from serious cork impacts are more common than previously thought—many people never recover fully from such injuries, and 26% of those treated for such injuries remain legally blind.

They cited one study in particular, conducted in 2009 in Italy, in which a research team found various degrees of visual impairment and long-term complications from bottle corks, including ocular hypertension and corneal injury. That research team also found what they described as "late" complications that developed over time after an injury, such as problems with pupil motility, post-traumatic glaucoma and traumatic optic neuropathy.

The research team also noted that the American Academy of Ophthalmology runs an ongoing campaign called "Uncork with Care," warning consumers of the dangers of uncorking and ways to open such bottles more safely. They note that the pressure inside of a bottle of sparkling water can be as high as three times that of a car tire, leading to cork speeds of 80kph—a speed that is fast enough for a cork to travel from the bottle to the eye of a person holding it in just 0.05 seconds—faster than a person can respond by closing their eyes.

More information: Ethan Waisberg et al, Cheers not tears: champagne corks and eye injury, *BMJ* (2023). DOI: 10.1136/bmj.p2520

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