

Do ordinary eyeglasses offer protection against COVID-19?

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(HealthDay)—Eyeglasses keep you from tripping over footstools and

walking into walls, but they also might have a side benefit to spark envy among those with 20/20 vision.

People who wear glasses every day might be less susceptible to COVID-19 infection, a Chinese study reports.

Only about 6% of 276 patients hospitalized for COVID-19 at Suizhou Zengdu Hospital in China needed to wear glasses daily due to their nearsightedness. But the proportion of nearsighted people in Hubei province, where the hospital is located, is much higher—around 32%, according to the study.

Eyeglasses might foil COVID-19 infection because they "prevent or discourage wearers from touching their eyes, thus avoiding transferring the virus from the hands to the eyes," Dr. Yiping Wei, of the Second Affiliated Hospital of Nanchang University, and colleagues speculated.

Eye protection also could potentially reduce the risk of virus-laden airborne droplets contacting the eyes, the study authors said in the report published online Sept. 16 in *JAMA Ophthalmology*.

However, eyeglass wearers who did contract COVID-19 fell just as sick as those with normal vision, the findings showed.

"Although this is an observational study and you cannot infer anything definitive from it, there is a suggestion that eye protection of any sort may decrease your risk of getting infected," said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar with the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, in Baltimore.

"This needs to be confirmed with other observational studies and more formal studies of, for example, face shield use. However, it is increasingly being noted that eye protection is important," Adalja added.

Many hospitals—including Mount Sinai South Nassau in Oceanside, N.Y.—require doctors, nurses and visitors to wear goggles or a face shield along with a mask to fully protect them from SARS-CoV-2, said Dr. Aaron Glatt, chairman of medicine and chief epidemiologist.

"Because we do make that a mandate, people frequently ask, 'If I wear glasses, is that good enough?' And our answer is no," Glatt said.

Regular prescription glasses don't completely cover the eyes as do goggles or face shields, he noted.

"Glasses might provide some protection, but obviously a regular pair of glasses, the particles in the air theoretically getting into the eye could easily go around the glasses," Glatt said.

According to Dr. Lisa Maragakis, it's also just as likely that eyeglasses "might pose an increased risk of touching one's eyes more frequently and potentially contaminating them when removing, replacing or adjusting the [eye protection](#)."

Maragakis, who wrote an editorial accompanying the new study, is senior director of infection prevention with the Johns Hopkins Health System.

She and Glatt noted that the study was based on a relatively small sample, and needs to be replicated in future research that involves more people.

"It's a provocative study. It's a very interesting study," Glatt said. "It certainly has science behind it to suggest it could be a causal effect, but it obviously needs to be studied under a more rigorous fashion or other studies need to confirm these same results."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [COVID-19](#).

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