



Warning

Health Canada warns public about coloured contact lenses

OTTAWA - Health Canada, in consultation with the Canadian Ophthalmological Society, the Canadian Association of Optometrists, the Opticians Association of Canada, the Retail Council of Canada and the Canadian Association of Chain Drugstores, is warning consumers of serious safety concerns with the use of non-corrective coloured contact lenses, also commonly known as "cosmetic" contacts.

Health Canada recognizes that all contact lenses, whether prescription or non-prescription, might present the same potential health hazards with respect to adverse effects and damage to the eye. The potential risk of serious eye injury with prescription contact lenses is considered minimal because the lenses are manufactured from approved materials, are properly fitted and are used under professional supervision.

However, cosmetic contacts that are being obtained off-the-shelf are not fitted and are used without professional eye-care supervision. Cosmetic contacts are currently not subject to the same health assessment as prescription contact lenses. As a result, they may pose a greater risk of injury. These risks include, but may not be limited to, the following:

- interference with the flow of oxygen to the cornea. This can cause swelling and ulceration of the cornea, which can lead to infection;
- accumulation of debris, such as dirt or dust, under improperly fitting lenses can damage the cornea and/or cause an infection;
- chemical or allergic reactions to the contact lens solutions can occur;
- contamination of the lens with microorganisms can cause serious irritation or infection;
- infection, also called ulcerative keratitis, can rapidly lead to blindness; and,
- temporary changes in the shape of the cornea causes interference with vision, especially at night.

These lenses are being sold in various retail outlets. Consumers of "cosmetic" contact lenses should discontinue use and consult an eye-care professional immediately should they experience or have experienced any pain, irritation, redness, haziness or visual disturbance.

Health Canada recommends that these cosmetic lenses be used only under the supervision of an eye-care professional. In addition, wear time should be limited to the shortest duration possible. The lenses must never be worn while asleep, and cosmetic contact lenses should not be shared with others.

For more information, consumers should contact their eye-care professional or the nearest regional office of Health Canada listed below:

Burnaby (604) 666-5003
Edmonton (780) 495-2626
Calgary (403) 292-4677
Saskatoon (306) 975-4502
Winnipeg (204) 983-5490
Hamilton (905) 572-2845
Scarborough (416) 973-4705
Longueuil (450) 646-1353
Québec (418) 648-4327
Moncton (506) 851-6638
Dartmouth (902) 426-8300
St. John's (709) 772-4050

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