



CHILDREN'S VISION & EYE HEALTH

# Strong Eyes. Bright Futures.



[optometrists.ab.ca](http://optometrists.ab.ca)

1.800.272.8843

A healthy, happy child starts with clear vision.  
Add eye exams to their health checklist.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- + 80% of learning is visual for a child.
- + 1 in 4 school-aged children have a vision problem.
- + Children with vision problems are **often misdiagnosed** as having learning or behavioural disabilities.
- + Children often **assume their vision is normal**, even when it's not.
- + The **earlier** an eye health or visual problem is identified, the **more likely it can be corrected** and the less likely it is to impact learning.
- + **Parents often miss vision problems**—especially if only one eye is affected.

If your child is not seeing properly, it can impact their ability to learn.



# Have Your Children Had Their Annual Eye Exam?

The Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan (AHCIP) provides partial coverage towards the eye exam.<sup>1</sup>

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## INFANTS

### Optometrists recommend:

Babies should have their first eye exam between 6–9 months.

### What we look for:

- + Eye health and development.
- + Eye and muscle movements and alignment.
- + Age-appropriate visual awareness.
- + If glasses are needed.

### *Parent tips!*

- + Babies can't read, so optometrists use special tests to check their eyes.
- + Choose a time of day when your little one is typically relaxed and in a good mood.



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## TODDLERS & PRESCHOOLERS

### Optometrists recommend:

Children should have **at least one eye exam** between ages 2-5.

### What we look for:

- + Healthy eyes and normal visual development.
- + Depth perception and colour vision.
- + Age-appropriate visual skills.
- + If glasses are needed.

#### ***Parent tips!***

- + Many visual skills needed for learning develop by this age.
- + Serious issues, if caught early, can often be reversed or prevented.

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## KINDERGARTEN

### Optometrists recommend:

Children should have an **eye exam before starting** kindergarten—and every year after.

#### ***Parent tip!***

- + Kindergarten students who need glasses can get them for free through the Eye See...Eye Learn™ program.  
Learn more at [optometrists.ab.ca/esel](https://optometrists.ab.ca/esel)

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## SCHOOL YEARS

### Optometrists recommend:

Children should have an **annual eye exam** once they are in school. Vision can change quickly and an eye exam is the only way your optometrist can ensure your child's eyes are ready for the challenge of learning in school.

# Eye Exams: What to Expect

Your child's eye exam takes **about 15 minutes** and starts with a few questions about your child's health, family history, and how they use their eyes at school and at play.

Your optometrist will use specially designed equipment to check their vision and eye health.

## **What's included:**

- + Conduct an external and internal eye health examination.
- + Evaluate eye alignment and movement.
- + Test depth perception, colour vision, and peripheral vision.
- + Evaluate vision and determine if glasses are needed.

# Vision Success

**In school and at play, kids rely on a range of visual skills working together to keep up, such as:**

- + Clear vision, near and far.
- + The ability to focus at any distance.
- + Good focusing flexibility to allow rapid change from one distance to another.
- + Binocular vision skills, including control of eye position, movement, and tracking.
- + Peripheral vision and eye-hand coordination.

If any of these skills are lacking or impaired, your child may struggle with fatigue, headaches, and keeping up in class—especially as their schoolwork becomes more demanding!



# Does Your Child Have a Visual Problem?

**Be alert for these signs and symptoms.**

- + Walking very early or very late.
- + Red, itchy, watery eyes.
- + Sensitivity to light.
- + An eye that turns in or out.
- + Squinting, rubbing, or excessive blinking.
- + Covering or closing one eye.
- + Tilting the head or using unusual posture.
- + Holding objects very close.
- + Using a finger to keep their place while reading.
- + Losing their place or skipping words while reading.
- + Avoiding books or screens.
- + Reading below their expected level.
- + Difficulty copying from the board.
- + Trouble focusing or concentrating.
- + Frustration, frowning, or grimacing.
- + Headaches or irritability.

## Don't Rely on Vision Screenings

**Passing a basic vision screening doesn't guarantee healthy eyes.**

- + **More than 43%** of children who have a vision or eye health problem can pass a basic vision screening.
- + Children may have one eye that is doing most of the work, hiding the fact that the other eye is not functioning properly. If left untreated, this could permanently impair your child's vision.
- + Many eye problems have no symptoms/pain.



Only an eye exam can properly assess your child's vision & eye health.

# Eye Conditions Affecting Children

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## NEARSIGHTEDNESS (MYOPIA)

Myopia means near objects are seen clearly, but distant objects appear blurred. It is very common and can develop at any age. Higher levels of myopia increase the risk of serious lifelong eye issues.

### Treatment

Poor distance vision can be corrected with eyeglasses. An eye exam is important for detecting early eye health issues.

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## FARSIGHTEDNESS (HYPEROPIA)

Distant objects are easier to see than near objects. With hyperopia, both distance and near vision may worsen with time causing fatigue, muscle tension, discomfort, and headaches.

### Treatment

Eyeglasses/contact lenses can correct farsightedness and reduce strain.

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## ASTIGMATISM

The cornea and/or lens is slightly irregular or cylindrical in shape, causing blurred or distorted vision at all distances and eye strain.

### Treatment

Eyeglasses/contact lenses can correct astigmatism.

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## STRABISMUS OR CROSSED EYES

**One eye turns in or out due to poor muscle control, disrupting eye alignment.**

Eye coordination develops in infancy. Failure of the eyes and brain to work together properly can cause strabismus.

Untreated strabismus often worsens. Children may experience double vision initially because both eyes are not focusing on the same object. Eventually the brain often learns to ignore the image from one eye. The ignored eye may become unused, lose normal function, and weaken, potentially leading to amblyopia (lazy eye).

### **Treatment:**

Eyeglasses, prisms, vision therapy, and sometimes surgery. It can be corrected with excellent results if detected and treated early.

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## AMBLYOPIA OR LAZY EYE

**Weak or reduced vision in one eye.** Often caused by an uncorrected prescription during early development or strabismus.

Amblyopia is usually symptom-free to a young child, but is the leading cause of vision impairment in children. If left untreated, amblyopia can lead to permanent vision impairment in the affected eye.

### **Treatment**

Early intervention before age six is crucial. Treatments may include vision therapy, eyeglasses, contact lenses, and/or patching. Treatment becomes very difficult later on.



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## CONJUNCTIVITIS: PINK EYE

An inflammation of the thin, transparent layer covering the surface of the inner eyelid and part of the eye's surface.

### Types

- + **Infectious:** Caused by a contagious virus or bacteria. Commonly known as “pink eye.”
- + **Allergic:** Triggered by pollen, cosmetics, pets, or fabrics.
- + **Toxic:** Caused by irritants like air pollution, noxious fumes, and chemicals such as chlorine in pools.

### Symptoms

- + Red eyes.
- + Inflamed eyelids.
- + Watery or pus-like discharge.
- + Itchy eyes (especially with allergic conjunctivitis).
- + Blurred vision.
- + Gritty or scratchy feeling.

### Treatment

Skip the emergency room or walk-in clinic. Your optometrist can determine the type of conjunctivitis and recommend the right treatment. Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan (AHCIP) provides partial coverage towards these medical appointments.

**Treatments may include:**

- + Antibiotic eye drops or ointment (for bacterial infections).
- + Artificial tears.
- + Cold compresses.
- + Antihistamine drops (for allergies).

#### ***Parent tips!***

- + Teach kids not to touch their eyes.
- + Encourage frequent handwashing.
- + Don't share towels, pillows, or washcloths.
- + Stay home from daycare or school until no longer contagious, as advised by your optometrist.

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## POOR EYE COORDINATION

**Eye coordination is the ability of both eyes to work together as a team.** Each eye sees a slightly different image, and the brain blends them into one clear, three-dimensional picture.

Good eye coordination keeps the eyes in proper alignment. Even a small misalignment can lead to symptoms like double vision, fatigue, or headaches. These skills develop in early childhood and are essential for reading, depth perception, and sports.

Signs of poor eye coordination can include covering one eye or tilting the head, losing place while reading, poor performance in sports, avoiding close work, or tiring easily.

### Treatment

Poor eye coordination can often be corrected with vision therapy, glasses, and/or other optical aids. Early detection leads to the best outcomes.

## Protect Your Child's Eyes From the Sun

Just like their skin, your child's eyes need protection from ultraviolet (UV) radiation year-round. Sun glare off snow can be just as harmful as the glare from water. Over time, UV exposure can increase the risk of serious eye conditions later in life, and young eyes are especially vulnerable.

### Tips for UV protection:

- + Choose appropriate UV400 sunglasses.
- + Wear a wide-brimmed hat or baseball cap for extra coverage.
- + Talk to your optometrist about the best sun protection for your child.



# Your Primary Eye Care Doctor

Optometrists are highly trained eye health professionals, completing at least three years of a Bachelor of Science, followed by a four-year Doctor of Optometry degree from an accredited university. They're your go-to experts for eye health, vision care, and eyewear needs.

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## DON'T HAVE AN OPTOMETRIST?

Visit **[optometrists.ab.ca](https://optometrists.ab.ca)** and click "Find an Optometrist" to see providers in your area.

# Medically Necessary & Urgent Eye Care

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## SKIP THE EMERGENCY ROOM OR WALK-IN CLINIC.

Optometrists are your go-to for urgent and medically necessary eye care.

### What's covered:

The Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan (AHCIP)<sup>1</sup> provides partial coverage for appointments related to eye health concerns.

### Optometrists can help with:

- + Red eye (pink eye infection, allergic conjunctivitis, chemical burn).
- + Infection or inflammation of the eye or eyelid.
- + Eye injury or foreign objects in the eye.
- + Sudden changes in vision.
- + Monitoring for diabetes and glaucoma complications.
- + Retinal detachment, defects and diseases.
- + Pre- and post-operative care for cataract patients.

**No referral needed!** Most optometrists keep time open each day for urgent care needs. If your child experiences an eye health concern—**don't wait.**



For information about many other common eye-related conditions, visit our website.

[optometrists.ab.ca](https://optometrists.ab.ca)

<sup>1</sup> Optometrists can charge for insured services that the optometrist deems exceeds the AHCIP benefit and Albertans are responsible for additional costs incurred at the time of treatment. Practitioners are required to discuss fees with their patients before providing the service.