

Literacy struggles in schools connected to vision problems for young students

Leduc Representative

Fri Oct 25 2013

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Section: News

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The reason some children are struggling to read and write in school may be directly connected to not being able to see properly.

According to Dr. Troy Brady from the Leduc Eye Centre, 60 per cent of young children who are experiencing literacy problems are also experiencing vision issues. Five to 10 per cent of preschool children who are also experiencing literacy issues in school is also due to vision problems.

Since it's difficult for parents to determine if their child has healthy eyes and most children don't show obvious symptoms because they assume everyone sees the way they do, it's important to visit one's optometrist on a regular basis.

For children up to 19 years of age, Alberta Health Services (AHS) covers the cost of eye exams from an optometrist. Without any cost and the importance of keeping one's eyes healthy, taking an exam shouldn't be an issue for parents and their children.

"It's important for children to have regular eye exams, so serious eye conditions can be identified and properly managed," said Dr. Brady, also noting October is Children's Vision Month.

It's recommended that children receive their first eye exam at six months of age; their second, by the age of three; their third before starting Kindergarten and each year after starting school.

"A child with an undetected vision problem can easily fall behind in school," said Dr. Brady. "Poor vision can delay a child's development, making learning and coordination for physical activities difficult."

Each year, fewer than 14 per cent of Canadian children under the age of six receive an eye exam before starting school, despite the fact that an estimated one in four school-aged children have a vision problem significant enough to impair their ability to learn.

In Alberta, a program called Eye See...Eye Learn is offered through the Alberta Association of Optometrists, which gives children in Kindergarten a comprehensive eye examination by a Doctor of Optometry, and if required, a complimentary pair of glasses.

"This program is in place to increase each child's access to vision care and to raise awareness of common eye conditions," said Dr. Brady.

Last year, 19,888 five-year-olds in Alberta had eye exams and of those tested, 1,783 needed glasses and received a complimentary pair through the Eye See...Eye Learn® program.

To learn more about the Eye See ... Eye Learn® program and to find an optometrist in your community visit, <http://ab.doctorsofoptometry.ca>