



For Immediate Release
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Media Contact: Dave Sonntag, Desautel Hege Communications,
(509) 444-2350
Traci Anderson, O.D.
(509) 735-3128

Dilated Eye Examinations Key to Prevention of Complications from Diabetes, Especially for Minorities

Large numbers of diabetics do not receive an annual dilated eye examination

Diabetes is much more prevalent among minority populations – specifically Mexican, African, Native and Latino Americans. In addition, those with diabetic eye disease often experience no early symptoms. Since the eye is the only place on the body where blood vessels can be seen without having to look through skin or other tissue, a dilated eye examination is an important avenue for diagnosing diabetes and the early on-set of diabetic eye disease.

According to the Washington State Department of Health, an average of one person in Washington goes blind each day due to preventable diabetic eye disease, which includes diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and cataracts. Yet, according to the Centers for Disease Control, as many as 40 percent of diagnosed diabetics do not have an annual dilated eye examination.

“Since 24 percent of Mexican Americans have diabetes – and American Indians are at nearly twice the risk of diabetes compared to Caucasians, with Latin Americans not far behind, it is especially important that individuals of these ethnic backgrounds receive an annual dilated eye exam,” says Traci Anderson, O.D. of the Optometric Physicians of Washington.

During a dilated eye exam, an eye care professional looks at the retina for early signs of the diabetic retinopathy as well as hypertension. Signs of diabetic retinopathy include leaking blood vessels, retinal swelling (macular edema), and deposits on the retina. Signs of hypertension include blood vessels that are narrowed, blocked with cholesterol, and/or full of unusual twists as well as retinal bleeding.

Research shows that almost half of the individuals diagnosed with diabetes have some degree of diabetic retinopathy. There are strong correlations between the presence of diabetic eye disease and other diabetes related complications of the kidneys, nerves and cardiovascular system. The longer one has diabetes, the greater the chance he or she will develop diabetic retinopathy. Other factors that increase the risk of

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developing diabetic eye disease include poor control of diabetes, smoking, high blood pressure and pregnancy.

"Early diabetic retinopathy often has no corresponding symptoms. Therefore, a patient may not notice visual changes until the disease has significantly progressed," continues Dr. Anderson. "The good news is that through early detection, routine monitoring, a medically-supervised program of diet and exercise to control blood-sugar levels and timely treatment with laser surgery, vision can be saved in more than 90 percent of those who would otherwise become blind from the disease."

"It is likely that many diabetics in Washington State that do not receive an annual dilated exam do not have medical insurance and can't afford one. For this reason, we urge individuals to look into the VISION USA program," says Dr. Anderson.

VISION USA is a year-round program that offers free comprehensive eye examinations to working Americans who do not have health insurance by matching qualifying individuals with an optometric physician in their community. Individuals can obtain an application by calling 1-800-766-4466, 7 a.m.- 9 p.m. CST, Monday through Friday.

The following are signs that may indicate diabetic eye disease:

- Your vision becomes blurry
- You have trouble reading signs or books
- You see double
- One or both of your eyes hurt
- Your eyes get red and stay that way
- You feel pressure in your eye
- You see spots or floaters
- Straight lines do not look straight
- Your peripheral vision (side vision) is limited

To learn more about diabetic eye disease, or for a referral to the optometric physician nearest you, please call the Optometric Physicians of Washington at 1-800-562-1487 or visit www.eyes.org.

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Free Dilated Eye Exam Programs

For more information, **MEDIA** may contact (not a contact for general public):
Dave Sonntag, Desautel Hege Communications
(509) 444-2350

VISION USA Requirements

To qualify for free eye care under VISION USA, persons must:

- have a job or live in a household where there is one working member at least part time,
- have no health insurance that covers eye examinations,
- have income below an established level based on household size and
- have had no eye examination in the past 24 months. Eligibility thresholds may vary by state.

To receive an application:

- Download an application from www.eyes.org (Click VISION USA link on home page)
- Write to VISION USA, 243 North Lindbergh Blvd, St. Louis, MO 63141
- Call 1-800-766-4466, 7 a.m.- 9 p.m. CST, Monday through Friday
- Ask your local social service agency, DMV office or library

VISION USA is made possible through the American Optometric Association, which administers the program through a grant from Vision Service Plan, Inc.

National Diabetes Initiative

A program for individuals beyond working age and receiving Medicare. A partnership between the American Optometric Association, the American Academy of Ophthalmology, and the Health Care Financing Administration.

- Program for Medicare beneficiaries with diabetes who have not had an eye exam in 2 or 3+ years
- Call American Optometric Association Diabetes Hotline at 1-800-262-3947 to be matched up with a participating physician in your area
- Participating physicians are asked to waive co-pay or deductibles