



Media Statement

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Cases of blindness from illegal laser pointers on the rise, eye doctors warn.

Perth's Lions Eye Institute has warned parents about the dangers of illegal hand-held laser pointers bought online.

Lasers pointed into the eyes can damage retinal tissue leading to catastrophic and irreversible visual loss.

Ophthalmologist Dr Chandra Balaratnasingam (Dr Bala) said doctors have witnessed an increase in eye damage caused by lasers.

Dr Bala said this type of eye injury was becoming more common in children and teenagers as laser pointers bought overseas or online often did not comply with Australian safety standards.

"The output of laser pointers purchased in Australia is very tightly regulated," he said.

"However, many people purchase them online from countries where there is no regulation and the output of these lasers can be more than 20 times what is considered safe.

"What we are finding is the rise in laser-induced retinopathy parallels their growing availability from unregulated manufacturers."

Dr Bala said anecdotally pre-teen and teenage boys who were curious and risk-takers were more likely to experiment with lasers.

He said parents needed to ensure the lasers they purchased were from a reputable company and preferably within Australia.

"The number one message is that these lasers are not toys and can easily cause inadvertent injury to the retina and vision loss," Dr Bala said.

Lasers on the red wavelength are typically safer than those in the green wavelength and are preferable for use in presentations and lectures.

“While people are well aware of damage to the eyes that occur in sports or as a result of sun exposure, many people are not aware of the dangers of hand held laser pointers,” he said.

Dr Bala recently published a report in the *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* alerting paediatricians about the dangers of laser pointers.

The full report can be read at www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jpc.13350/full

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Image: Dr Balaratnasingam, of the Lions Eye Institute, says this illegal green wavelength laser is powerful enough to cause severe vision loss