



Media Statement

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Australian researchers want to help parents and carers get access to good online information about serious childhood eye disorders

Parents and carers who notice an abnormal white reflection in a child's eye will often seek information online – but Australian researchers want to ensure the information they find is accurate and appropriate.

Photoleukocoria is a phenomenon where the white reflection is picked up in a photograph. In this scenario, the child may have a condition that prevents the camera's flash from reaching the retina and is one of the most common signs of serious paediatric eye disease, including cataract and the paediatric eye cancer retinoblastoma.

A new Australian research [study](#) published in Translational Vision Science & Technology examines which search terms people use to find out more about photoleukocoria.

One of the study authors, Lions Eye Institute Managing Director Professor David Mackey, said participants were shown pictures of children with leukocoria and 98.4 per cent were able to identify the abnormality.

They were then tasked with searching for information about the condition, with the most commonly used search terms including "white", "pupil", "photo" and "eye".

“This lead them to a range of websites, with differences in the description of the photoleukocoria influencing the sites reached, the information obtained and subsequent motivation to seek medical help,” Professor Mackey said.

“We believe that having identified the most commonly used search terms for photoleukocoria is an important step for search engine optimisation.

“Being directed to the most appropriate websites that tells carers how serious photoleukocoria can be will prompt them to take action and potentially reduce delays in diagnosis.”

Professor Mackey said ensuring parents and carers were directed to accurate medical information online was vital because early diagnosis could be lifesaving.

He said while parents were often the first to notice and report the white pupil, they were generally unaware that it was a sign of a potentially fatal disease.

“Educating caregivers about the importance of recognising leukocoria early has been shown to significantly improve survival of children with retinoblastoma,” Professor Mackey said.

“With increasing numbers of people turning to the internet for initial health information, it is vital that the information is accurate and helps people make decisions about next steps, such as promptly seeking an expert medical opinion.”

Organisations currently hosting information about photoleukocoria can be alerted to the most commonly used search terms identified in this research to ensure their sites are reached should these search terms be used.

Media Contact: Francesca Robb – francescarobb@lei.org.au / 0409 102 556

Image: Photoleukocoria is an abnormal white reflection which can indicate a serious paediatric eye condition