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## **BACK TO SCHOOL: PREVENTING EYE INJURIES IN OUR CHILDREN**

As children across Australia and New Zealand return to school in the coming weeks, parents and caregivers should be aware of the risk of paediatric eye injuries as school and sport resume.

The Lions Eye Institute (LEI) in Western Australia is currently working on a large research program to find solutions to prevent children's eye injuries. As part of this research a 12 year audit was conducted of children's eye injuries requiring admission to hospital in Perth, WA. This has led to a proposal for sports eye protection to be accepted for review by Standards Australia in late November last year.

Sports-related eye injuries are common, due to children's close proximity to fast-moving balls, sharp equipment and physical contact with other competitors. It was stated in the LEI study that in Australia eye injuries from sporting activities accounted for 10% of severe eye trauma in children, with permanent visual damage occurring in 27% of these cases.

In the playground and elsewhere, novelty items such as loom bands (rubber bracelets) have caused significant eye damage to children both in Australia and overseas. The availability of hand-held laser 'toys' and their potential to cause retinal damage is also a concern.

Children's developing physical coordination and limited ability to detect risks in their environment increases their risk of eye trauma. While risks should not hinder the provision of engaging and interesting activities in school environments, mild injuries such as eyelid bruising or corneal abrasions do occur. Lasting damage can be caused by more serious high-impact injuries such as blunt trauma or penetrating injuries.

RANZCO President Dr Brad Horsburgh explains further: 'A child's visual development continues from birth until seven to eight years of age therefore visual outcomes following trauma in children are worse than adults. Any approach to reduce incidence of eye injuries in children should attempt to remove or limit hazards – with parents and caregivers as vital influences on attitudes for change.'

From the 12 year audit by LEI it was found that children's eye injuries requiring hospital admission were most commonly caused by being struck by an object. "Other causes were children falling over, and hitting their eye, and then things being thrown," says Prof David Mackey, Managing Director of LEI.

With these findings, Prof Mackey stresses that, "The most important thing is that parents and people involved in the care and supervision of children are alert to potential dangers. We need to work further at designing better protective strategies for children. Looking at sports perhaps change the rules of the sport or the ways children use pieces of equipment, and if that's not possible, whether we can have protective headgear that they can wear to stop their eyes being injured."

By adopting simple protective measures, such as using eye protectors when necessary, 90% of eye injury is preventable.

"School should be a safe environment for childhood learning and with proper precautions and education, we can make sure that it is for our children and their eyesight," concludes Dr Horsburgh.

Prof David Mackey spoke about the LEI study findings at the 46<sup>th</sup> RANZCO Annual Scientific Congress in Brisbane last year. The video can be found [here](#).

**For an interview with Dr Brad Horsburgh please contact Luke Vanem or Louise Treloar at RANZCO on 61 426 842 121 and [media@ranzco.edu](mailto:media@ranzco.edu)**

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