



MEDIA STATEMENT

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Research project to refine health messages on optimal sun exposure for the eyes.

The Lions Eye Institute (LEI) is embarking on a major project to discover exactly how much sun exposure is best for your eyes.

LEI Managing Director and Project Director of the WA Eye Protection Study (WAEPS), Professor David Mackey, said people active in a range of outdoor sports were being recruited to the study.

“Public health messages around sun exposure are getting more complex,” he said.

“Too much time indoors and screen time is a major factor in myopia, or short-sightedness.

“Even with glasses and contact lenses, myopia can lead to irreversible blindness and is now an epidemic in school leavers in East Asian cities with 90 per cent needing glasses or contact lenses. In Australia, myopia is found in around 20 per cent of the population.

“Too much sun exposure, however, is associated with eye conditions like pterygium - a red, raised, fleshy area on the white of the eye. If pterygium growth goes unchecked, it can cover the iris and affect vision.

“We want to find the balance between the protective and risk factors of sun exposure for the eyes, which will then provide information for evidence-based public health campaigns in the future.”

Professor Mackey said the WAEPS project had also been selected by The University of Western Australia for a unique Crowd Research capital raising campaign.

“This means people from all over the world with an interest in our research can get involved, either as citizen scientists or by way of financial support,” he said.

“In our case, we hope to raise \$30,000 for an orthoptist to carry out the testing of research participants.”

The study is targeting adolescents and adults in different outdoor sports – including rowing, surfing, surf-life saving, sailing, cricket and football - to measure their relative amounts of sun damage and short-sightedness.

The research team will then conduct comprehensive eye examinations – including testing for visual acuity (how well they can see), intraocular pressure and sun damage - on around 1000 participants.

“From this research we hope to be able to give a personalised health message of when a person has too much sun - or too little,” Professor Mackey said.

“This knowledge will ensure future generations of Australians can make informed choices about their level of outdoor activity.”

If you are interested in participating, visit <http://www.mackeylab.org/eps>

For information on the UWA Crowd Research campaign, visit <http://crowdresearch.csp.uwa.edu.au/he?project=evaluation-of-eye-protection-in-adolescents-and-adults-participating-in-sport-and-outdoor-activity>

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