



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For more information:

Stacie Lehman
800-301-2020 ext. 105

**SECOND LEADING CAUSE OF
BLINDNESS CAN STRIKE AT ANY AGE**
In Rare Cases, Children and Teenagers May Have the Disease

COLUMBUS, OH – Glaucoma is often called the “sneak thief of sight” because half of all patients have it and do not know it. Although some may consider the eye disease something that only happens to older people, the truth is even children and teenagers can be diagnosed with it.

A.J. DeGeorge is now 27 years old but has been receiving treatment for juvenile open-angle glaucoma since he was 13. At the time of his diagnosis, he exhibited no signs or symptoms of the potentially blinding eye disease. His glaucoma was only discovered because of a routine eye exam.

Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness in the world, second only to cataracts, and the leading cause of blindness in African-Americans, according to the National Institutes of Health. Left untreated, glaucoma can lead to damage of the optic nerve, visual field loss, and ultimately sight loss.

“There were no warning signs. I had very close to 20/20 vision and never had any pain,” said DeGeorge. “But, when the doctors checked the pressures in my eyes, they were unbelievably high and my optic nerves had shown signs of damage.”

After his diagnosis, DeGeorge began treatment with a glaucoma specialist, Mildred M.G. Olivier, M.D. of the Midwest Glaucoma Center. Initial treatment included medications but later a Trabeculectomy (surgery) was needed in the right eye to lower the eye pressure so that no further damage would occur. Today, thanks to the early detection and consistently following his doctor’s directions, DeGeorge needs only to take eye drops in his left eye once a day.

“Although having glaucoma at such a young age is rare, I think A.J.’s story demonstrates the need for everyone, including those young and more mature, to receive an eye exam,” said Dr. Olivier. “There is no cure for glaucoma, but with early treatment, we can lessen the risk of severe vision loss.”

There are more than 2.3 million Americans over the age of 40 who have been diagnosed with glaucoma. Unfortunately, once glaucoma takes away sight, it cannot be restored. That is why Prevent Blindness Ohio has joined other leading eye care groups in designating January as National Glaucoma Awareness Month in an effort to educate the public on the disease.

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Prevent Blindness Ohio Provides Free Resources on Glaucoma

“We urge everyone to make regular visits to their eye care professional for comprehensive eye examinations in which the pupil is dilated,” said Sherry Williams, President and CEO of Prevent Blindness Ohio. “Many insurance policies, including Medicare, will cover glaucoma exams for qualified individuals. Don’t put off saving your vision until tomorrow. It may be too late!” added Williams.

Everyone is at risk for developing glaucoma. However, some factors that may increase the chance of having the disease include:

- **Age** – The older you are, the greater your risk.
- **Race** – African-Americans have glaucoma four to five times more often than others. African-Americans are also likely to have glaucoma at a younger age.
- **Family history** – If you have a parent, brother or sister with glaucoma, you are more likely to get glaucoma too. If you have glaucoma, your family members should get complete eye exams.
- **Medical history** – Diabetes, previous eye injuries, eye surgery or long-term steroid use can increase your risk of glaucoma.

Prevent Blindness Ohio offers free informational resources, including treatment options and general information through its Web site or via phone. “The Glaucoma Learning Center” (at www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma) contains a variety of resources including an adult vision risk assessment and an interactive guide on how to take eye drops. The website also includes “The Glaucoma Web Discussion Forum” that allows patients and caregivers the opportunity to discuss online all subjects related to the disease.

Prevent Blindness Ohio also offers free printed materials including the “Guide for People with Glaucoma.” This comprehensive booklet serves as a handbook for patients and includes information on what to expect during treatment and even a list of questions to ask the eye doctor.

And, Prevent Blindness Ohio offers a free resource directory for those who may require financial assistance or may have questions about Medicare coverage in regards to glaucoma. Consumers can obtain free printed materials on glaucoma in either English or Spanish by calling 800-301-2020 or by visiting www.pbohio.org.

Prevent Blindness Ohio, founded in 1957, is Ohio’s leading volunteer nonprofit public health organization dedicated to preventing blindness and preserving sight. We serve all 88 Ohio counties, providing direct services to more than 800,000 Ohioans annually and educating millions of consumers about what they can do to protect and preserve their precious gift of sight. Prevent Blindness Ohio is an affiliate of Prevent Blindness America, the country’s second-oldest national voluntary health organization. For more information or to make a contribution, visit our website at www.pbohio.org or call 800-301-2020.

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- The 2008 update to Prevent Blindness America's *Vision Problems in the U.S.* report states that close to 2.3 million Americans age 40 and older, or about 1.9 percent of that population, have glaucoma.
- Prevent Blindness America's 2007 research study, "*The Economic Impact of Vision Problems*" states that glaucoma costs the U.S. economy \$2.86 billion every year in direct medical costs for outpatient, inpatient and prescription drug services.
- The same study found that glaucoma patients between the ages of 40 and 64 years of age can expect to pay \$3,352 annually per person in direct medical costs for outpatient, inpatient and prescription drug services. For those 65 and older, the annual costs jump to \$5,243 per person.
- Juvenile open angle glaucoma (JOAG) is a rare form of glaucoma that accounts for approximately one percent of total cases. The clinical features of JOAG are the same as those of more common forms of glaucoma.
- Approximately 120,000 people are blind from glaucoma, accounting for 9-12 percent of all cases of blindness in the U.S. (National Eye Health Program/National Institutes of Health).
- It is estimated that as of 2000, at least 66.8 million people in the world have glaucoma. (Glaucoma Service Center to Prevent Blindness).
- Glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness in the world after cataracts, (according to the World Health Organization), and the leading cause of blindness in African-Americans (according to the National Institutes of Health).
- According to the National Eye Institute, glaucoma is:
 - Five times more likely to occur in African-Americans than in whites.
 - About four times more likely to cause blindness in African-Americans than in whites.
 - Fifteen times more likely to cause blindness in African-Americans between the ages of 45-64 than in whites of the same age group.
- In the early stages, glaucoma has no symptoms, no noticeable vision loss, no pain, which is why it is called the "sneak thief of sight." By the time symptoms start to appear, some permanent damage to the eye has usually occurred.
- Glaucoma that is undiagnosed or poorly controlled can lead to damage of the optic nerve, visual field loss, and ultimately sight loss. People with glaucoma usually lose peripheral vision first. Over time, glaucoma may also damage central vision. Once lost, vision cannot be restored.
- Prevent Blindness America recommends that older people get regular, comprehensive eye exams, even if they have no signs of vision problems. The earlier glaucoma is detected, the better the chances are of preserving sight.
- Prevent Blindness America, with support from Alcon, Inc., provides "The Glaucoma Learning Center," a comprehensive online tool to educate consumers on a variety of topics related to the disease at www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma.

- Everyone is at risk for glaucoma from young to old. Although older people are at higher risk, approximately 1 out of every 10,000 babies born in the United States is diagnosed with the disease (according to the Glaucoma Research Foundation).

Glaucoma Risk Factors

- **Age:** Those that are 40 and older are more likely to develop glaucoma. The older you are, the greater your risk.
- **Race:** People of African or Afro-Caribbean heritage are more likely to get glaucoma than the rest of the population. They are also more likely to develop glaucoma at a younger age.
- **Family History:** If you have a parent or sibling who has glaucoma, you are more likely to develop the disease.
- **Diabetes:** People with diabetes have a higher risk (40 percent) of developing glaucoma.
- **Nearsightedness:** People who are very nearsighted are at greater risk.
- **Eye Injury or Surgery:** Those who have had eye surgery or eye injuries may develop secondary glaucoma.
- **Steroid Medication:** Steroids may increase the risk of glaucoma when used for extended periods of time.

Types of Glaucoma:

Chronic (Open Angle) Glaucoma: This is the most common type. In open angle glaucoma, aqueous fluid drains too slowly and pressure inside the eye builds up. It usually results from aging of the drainage channel, which doesn't work as well over time. However, younger people can also get this type of glaucoma.

Normal Tension Glaucoma: This is a form of open angle glaucoma not related to high pressure. People with normal tension glaucoma may be unusually sensitive to normal levels of pressure. Reduced blood supply to the optic nerve may also play a role in normal tension glaucoma.

Acute (Angle Closure) Glaucoma: This causes a sudden rise in eye pressure, requiring immediate, emergency medical care. The signs are usually serious and may include blurred vision, severe headaches, eye pain, nausea, vomiting or seeing rainbow-like halos around lights. Occasionally, the condition may be without symptoms; similar to open angle.

Secondary Glaucoma: Another 10 percent of glaucoma cases come from certain diseases and conditions that damage the eye's drainage system. These include diabetes, leukemia, sickle-cell anemia, some forms of arthritis, cataracts, eye injuries or inflammation of the eye, steroid drug use and growth of unhealthy blood vessels.

Post-surgical Glaucoma: Some surgeries, such as retinal reattachments, increase the chance of getting glaucoma.

Glaucoma

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GLAUCOMA IS OFTEN CALLED THE “SNEAK THIEF OF SIGHT” BECAUSE IT SLOWLY ROBS PEOPLE OF THEIR VISION OVER TIME. GLAUCOMA CAN BE FOUND IN ADULTS AND, IN RARE INSTANCES, EVEN CHILDREN. UNFORTUNATELY, ONCE VISION IS LOST FROM GLAUCOMA, IT CANNOT BE RESTORED. THE ONLY WAY TO KNOW IF YOU HAVE GLAUCOMA IS BY GETTING A COMPREHENSIVE EYE EXAM. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON GLAUCOMA AND GLAUCOMA TREATMENTS, PLEASE CALL PREVENT BLINDNESS OHIO AT 800-301-2020.

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