

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information:
Prevent Blindness America
Sarah Hecker
(312) 363-6035

NEW CDC STUDY CONFIRMS SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF CHILDREN ARE NOT RECEIVING PROPER VISION CARE

National Patient Advocate Group Applauds CDC for Attention Given to Saving Sight in America's Children

CHICAGO (May 10, 2005) – According to a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately only one in three children in America have received eye care services before their sixth birthday. Because many childhood eye diseases, including amblyopia, the most common form of vision loss in children, can be treated and cured if detected early in life, the numbers of children tested falls disappointingly short. The “Visual Impairment and Use of Eye-Care Services and Protective Eyewear Among Children” findings, published in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, were the result of a national survey with more than 12,000 participants.

Amblyopia, a sight-threatening problem in children, can lead to monocular blindness if left untreated. The condition can be detected by a vision screening or eye exam. When identified early and treated, the greater the likelihood of success. It becomes harder to treat after age 6 or 7, as the eyes are then fully developed. Strabismus (crossed or misaligned eyes) affects one in 50 children in the U.S., and can lead to amblyopia if not corrected.

The study also found that Asian and Hispanic children were the least likely to get their vision checked, compared to black or white children. This is especially concerning since the report also showed that the number of **Hispanic children had a higher prevalence of visual impairment and blindness than white children** (3.6 percent and 2.3 percent, respectively).

Prevent Blindness America (PBA), the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization, hopes that the new study will bring the issue of children's eye health to the forefront in people's minds and, the group strongly supports efforts to insure that children receive periodic and professional eye care as part of a continuum of preventive eye health services.

“The CDC findings are integral in helping us communicate to parents how important vision care is in ensuring a lifetime of vision health in their children. We applaud the CDC in continuing to make vision health a national issue and this is a great start in outreaching to the public,” said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of PBA. “Our

PBA Wants New CDC Findings to Encourage Parents to Make Children's Vision Health a Priority

Page 2

organization offers free vision screenings through our affiliates across the country as well as free information on our Web site and toll-free number including Spanish language materials, and hope the public will utilize these services."

Besides vision exams, the report also studied the issue of eye safety in relation to sports. According to the CDC, only 14.6 percent of all children, ages 6-17, consistently wear protective eye gear. And, girls are less likely than boys to wear eye protection.

"Eye Safety is another issue that is close to PBA," said Garrett. "Of the nearly 36,000 sports-related eye injuries treated in U.S. hospital emergency rooms in 2002, more than 40 percent were to children age 14 and younger, many of which could have been avoided. We want parents to insist their kids protect their eyes and stay out of the hospital."

PBA offers the following tips for ensuring children's eye health and safety:

What do your child's eyes look like?

- Eyes don't line up, one eye appears crossed or looks out
- Eyelids are red-rimmed, crusted or swollen
- Eyes are watery or red (inflamed)

How does your child act?

- Rubs eyes a lot
- Closes or covers one eye
- Tilts head or thrusts head forward
- Has trouble reading or doing other close-up work, or holds objects close to eyes to see
- Blinks more than usual or seems cranky when doing close-up work
- Things are blurry or hard to see
- Squints eyes or frowns

What does your child say?

- "My eyes are itchy," "my eyes are burning" or "my eyes feel scratchy."
- "I can't see that very well."
- After doing close-up work, your child says "I feel dizzy," "I have a headache" or "I feel sick/nauseous."
- "Everything looks blurry," or "I see double."

For eye protection in sports, lenses should be made of polycarbonate and bear an ASTM label, indicating they meet the standards of the American Society of Testing Materials (ASTM) for the specific sport. Eye protection must also fit properly in order to be effective.

- More -

PBA Wants New CDC Findings to Encourage Parents to Make Children's Vision Health a Priority

Page 3

For more information on children's eye health or general vision information, please visit www.preventblindness.org or call 1-800-331-2020. (The CDC study posted in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5417a2.htm>).

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the Web at www.preventblindness.org.

###