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Number of Cases of Leading Cause of Blindness and Vision Loss Continues to Grow

***-Americans Spend Close to \$7 Billion a Year
on Direct Medical Costs Related to Cataract-***

Houston, TX (June 1, 2011) – Cataract is the leading cause of blindness in the world. There are more cases of cataract than there are of glaucoma, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy combined. Today, cataract affects more than 22 million Americans age 40 and older. By age 75, approximately 70 percent of people have cataracts. And, as the U.S. population ages, more than 30.1 million Americans are projected to have cataracts by the year 2020.

Prevent Blindness Texas has declared June as Cataract Awareness Month in an effort to educate the public on the risk factors, symptoms and treatment options available to those with cataract.

Cataract is a clouding of the eye's lens which blocks or changes the passage of light into the eye. The lens of the eye is located behind the pupil and the colored iris and is normally transparent. The lens helps to focus images onto the retina - which transmits the images to the brain. Vision may become blurry or dim because the cataract stops light from properly passing through to the retina.

Risk factors for developing cataract include a family history of cataract, diabetes, smoking, extended exposure to UV rays, serious eye injury and the use of steroids.

Americans spend \$6.8 billion every year on direct medical costs for outpatient, inpatient and prescription drug services for cataract, according to the 2007 "Economic Impact of Vision Problems: The Toll of Major Adult Eye Disorders, Visual Impairment, and Blindness on the U.S. Economy" study funded by Prevent Blindness America.

"We encourage everyone, especially for those ages 40 and over, to get a dilated, baseline eye exam from their eye care professional," said Debbie Goss, President and CEO of Prevent Blindness Texas. "This gives your eye doctor the best opportunity to monitor any changes in the eyes and treat them accordingly."

Generally, a cataract does not cause pain, redness or tears. The following problems may indicate a cataract:

- Blurred vision, double vision, ghost images, or the sense of a "film" over the eyes.
- Lights seem too dim for reading or close-up work, or eyes are "dazzled" by strong light.
- Eyeglass prescriptions change often and the change does not seem to help vision.
- Double vision in one eye
- A milky or yellowish spot develops in the pupil.

Many cases of cataracts will require surgery. Cataract surgery is the most frequently performed surgery in the United States with an average of 3 million Americans undergoing cataract surgery annually. Fortunately, it has a 95 percent success rate, generally resulting with patient's vision of 20/20 to 20/40.

For free information on cataracts in both English and Spanish, or to receive the "Your Guide to Cataract Surgery" and "Medicare Benefits and Your Eyes" fact sheets, please call Prevent Blindness Texas at 1-888-98-SIGHT or log on to www.preventblindness.org/TX.

About Prevent Blindness Texas

Founded in 1956, Prevent Blindness is the state'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 Texas touches the lives of thousands 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 Texas public. Through a network of regional offices and volunteers, we are committed to eliminating preventable blindness in Texas. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-888-98-SIGHT or visit us on the Web at www.preventblindness.org/TX.

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