

NEWS PHOTO
EMMA BENNETT
Dr. Joel Harris, optometrist at Costco Optical, displays a children's eye-wear on Monday. October is Children's Vision Month.



Children's Vision Month reminds parents that regular exams are the only way

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October marks Children's Vision Month and with it, the importance of catching any vision problems in children as early as possible.

Children's Vision Month is a national campaign meant to encourage parents to have their children's eyesight examined regularly, explained Dr. Nobe Nijjar, an optometrist with Costco's vision clinic, and serving as the regional spokesperson for the month.

"(It's) for parents to understand the importance of vision exams and full eye exams by doctors of optometry to diagnose vision problems in children, includ(ing) babies and toddlers."

Sixty-one per cent of Canadian parents mistakenly believe they would be able to identify if their child had a vision problem, said Nijjar.

And children aren't capable of recognizing that they have vision problems either.

"What they see is what they know, if they're born with 2200 vision, that's the way they assume the world is," he said. "And obviously we have no way, as parents, to understand what

they're seeing."

Which is why a trip to the optometrist is needed to evaluate a child's eyesight.

In Alberta, yearly eye exams for children are covered through healthcare, noted Nijjar. Also available is the "Eye See... I Learn!" program which gives children their first pair of glasses free if they're going into kindergarten.

Children often adapt to hide eyesight problems — in some cases children can see very well out of one eye but not the other, Nijjar explained — so they're able to read eye charts but may lack co-ordination in sports due to lack of depth perception.

"Perhaps even more importantly, is reading and the ability to learn. If a child is only using one eye, it's taking them longer to read and comprehend things and often a major reason why children don't take an interest in academic activity. It can be quite frustrating as a student to read at only half the pace of their peers."

Sixty per cent of children that have issues with literacy — including reading or writing — have an undiagnosed vision problem, he said.

"So we'd much rather be diagnosing a child at two, rather than seven, eight, or 12."