



## *Early Warning Signs of Vision Loss*

Children who have vision loss might have normal-looking eyes. Often, it will be something about a child's behavior or the way he uses his eyes that makes you think there might be a problem with the way he sees. The American Public Health Association estimates that only about 14 percent of young children (younger than 6 years of age) have had their eyes and vision examined. They have adopted a policy that encourages regular eye examinations for babies at 6 months, 2 years and 4 years.

It takes your baby's eyes some time to adjust to the world, so at first they might not always look or function the way you expect. For example, it's perfectly normal in the first three months of life for your infant's eyes to be crossed, or for him not to be able to see much past your face when you're holding him.

Most babies start to focus on faces and objects by 4-5 weeks of age. By about 6-8 weeks, most babies will start smiling at the familiar faces and things they see. However, if a baby has a vision impairment, you might notice she has trouble actually looking at you. An example may be that your child appears to look through you and not at you or not directly looking at his/her toy or object.

A baby's vision develops quickly during the first year of life.

- Newborns: Can see large shapes and faces, as well as bright colors.
- By 3 to 4 months: Most babies can focus on a variety of smaller objects and tell the difference between colors (especially red and green).
- By 4 months: A baby's eyes should begin to develop depth perception. This is when both of your baby's eyes work together.
- By 12 months: A child's vision is typically fully developed. At this time he is starting to learn and understand what he sees.

Is your baby's vision developing as it should? Could your baby have a vision impairment? Would you know what signs to look for?

## **Infant/Toddler Vision Concerns Checklist**

### ***Physical Appearance***

- Eyes move quickly from side to side (nystagmus), jerk or wander randomly.
- Eyes doesn't follow your face or an object, or he doesn't seem to make eye contact with family and friends?
- Eyes don't react to bright light being turned on in the room.
- Pupils seem white or cloudy rather than black.
- Cloudy or milky appearance of the eyes not just pupils
- Eyes don't line up but look towards his nose or turn outwards.
- Irregular Pupil Shape
- Looks cross-eyed, her eyes turn out, or her eyes don't seem to work in unison.
- His eyes flutter quickly from side to side or up and down.
- Has redness in her eyes that doesn't go away after a few days and is sometimes accompanied by pain or sensitivity to light.
- Has a droopy eyelid that never fully opens.
- Has white, grayish-white, or yellowish material in the pupil of her eyes. (Her eyes look cloudy.)
- Has bulging eyes.
- Has any change in the appearance of his eyes.
- Has one eye that appears larger than the other, or pupils of different sizes.

### ***Observed Behavior***

- Needs to have books very close when reading.
- Holds toys and objects very close when looking at them
- Visually inattentive/uninterested
- Overly attentive to lights (in children over three months of age)
- Squints or blinks often.
- Tilts his head to see better (while looking at a picture or the television, for example).
- Rubs her eyes when she's not sleepy.
- Closes one eye to see better (while looking at a book or watching television, for example).
- Avoids close, near-vision activities like scribbling, coloring, playing board games, or doing schoolwork.
- Avoids distance-vision activities, like watching birds or planes or playing catch, or has trouble seeing small objects at a distance or reading the blackboard in school.
- Has trouble following an object with his eyes (visual tracking).
- Seems especially clumsy compared to other children the same age.

## **Other Concerns**

- Has recurrent headaches at the end of the day.
- Gets tired after looking at things up close- for example, reading, drawing or playing handheld games.
- Seems overly sensitive to light.
- Complains of double vision.
- Has a persistent, unusual spot in his eyes in photos taken with a flash (a white spot, for example, instead of the common red eyes).
- Has difficulty seeing at night or in low light.
- Is not able to distinguish certain colors (red from green, for example).
- Has difficulty seeing objects that are potential hazards, such as steps, curbs, and walls.

## **What do I do if I suspect my child has a vision loss?**

Your baby's doctor can help you determine whether you should be concerned. The doctor may examine your child's eyes, screen his vision, or refer you to a medical eye specialist (ophthalmologist). If vision problems run in your baby's family, be sure to mention it.

## **What do I do if my child has a vision loss?**

There are programs and services to help you and your child. These interventions might include:

- Meeting with a professional (or team) who is trained to work with children who have vision loss.
- Joining family support groups.
- Other services available to children with vision loss and their families.

## **Additional Resources for Families**

### **West Virginia Birth to Three (WV BTT):**

<http://www.wvdhhr.org/birth23/Default.asp>

WV Telephone: (304) 558-5388

Fax: (304) 558-2183

Toll Free in WV: (800) 642-9704/8522 BTT

<http://www.wvdhhr.org/birth23/contact.asp>

### **WV BTT Resources Vision and Hearing Impairment:**

<http://www.wvdhhr.org/birth23/resources.asp>

### **Wonder Baby**

<http://www.wonderbaby.org/>

### **Children's Vision Rehabilitation Project**

<http://medicine.hsc.wvu.edu/eye/outreach/childrens-vision-rehabilitation-program-cvrp/>