

Winter Eye Safety Tips

FROM SPECTERA®, YOUR VISION PLAN

Winter brings many fun holiday activities, but it's important to make sure that those happy memories aren't marred by preventable tragedies. Your family eye doctor and Spectera® are focusing our Eye Safety Campaign this winter on some leading hazards to your eye health and safety. We want to make sure that you enjoy your holidays and winter activities with your family, not in the emergency room. Each year, more than 100,000 Americans, more than half of them children, suffer from eye injuries. Sadly, more than 90 percent of these could have been prevented.

Unsafe toys

Unsafe toys are the leading cause of blindness and eye injuries in children. It is important that you not buy toys with sharp or pointed edges, or exposed nails that can cut or poke an eye. Always select toys that are appropriate to the child's age. Age labeling is important, not only for developmental reasons, but also for safety.

Children under two should never have toys with stick handles. Those under eight should not play with darts (even those with suction cups), arrows, slingshots, or other missile throwing games. Older children should use this type of toy only under your supervision and after being taught the proper way to play with them.

Every year, thousands of people, especially children, end up in the emergency room with serious injuries from BB and pellet guns. These "toys" pose an extreme danger because they encourage young people to shoot at each other. They have been removed from the toy section of stores for that very reason.

Look for the letters ASTM on the toys you are considering for your child. This means that the product meets the national safety standards set by the American Society for Testing and Materials.

Cigarettes and Cigars

When weather is warmer, most smokers try to smoke outdoors, but blasts of Artic air sometimes drive those smokers to reconsider that strategy. This is an awful mistake when children are present in the home. If you must smoke, be aware of the dangers that smoking products, such as cigarettes and cigars, pose to children. Most smokers may not realize that smoking products can cause serious damage to children's eyes. They rank as the second leading cause of injury to children under five years of age and affect more than 3,000 each year.

These eye injuries occur because of children's natural curiosity. They often grab ashtrays placed above their eye level, often with the smoking materials still burning. The result can cause permanent damage, or even blindness from a burned cornea. Other damage is caused by the smoke and ashes that get into a child's eyes. It may be inconvenient to end indoor smoking at your home, but that inconvenience is worth a child's sight.



Winter sports eye protection

If a minibike, skis, or snowmobile is on that wish list this year, make sure that everyone who uses them is wearing appropriate sports protective eyewear with polycarbonate lenses. These are available from your family eye doctor.

Sunglasses are not just for lounging by the pool or on the golf course. The greatest danger to the eyes in the winter is ultraviolet light and protecting them is just as important because snow is so blinding. Ultraviolet (UV) rays, which also cause sunburn, can harm both the lens and cornea, leading to cataracts and other eye damage. Winter conditions make eyes even more susceptible to UV damage. Humidity is lower and eyes can tend to dehydrate. Wind also dehydrates and irritates the eye. The thin clouds and haze of winter also do not absorb UV rays as well as thick, dark, heavy clouds. Those who participate in mountain snow sports are at the greatest risk, because there is more ultraviolet light at higher altitudes.

Visit your family eye doctor to find appropriate protective eyewear for snow sports. Ski goggles, for instance, protect the skin around the eyes and the eyelashes, as well as the eyes themselves. This is especially important because the skin of your upper lids is one of the thinnest on the body. The best winter sunglasses are those that include 100 percent UV protection, are polarized to reduce glare, and wrap around to protect the entire eye.

If you or a family member does suffer an eye injury, it is important to seek appropriate eye care right away. If possible, call your family eye doctor and carefully follow all of the directions that you are given. The right care rendered in a timely fashion could mean the difference between a life of blindness or sight.