

# Routine Eye Care for Kids

**Vision problems in children are uncommon. But when they do occur, they often go undetected.**

Young children may not realize or be able to communicate that their vision is impaired, and even older children may not notice if the vision in only one eye is affected. Every parent wants their child to have perfect vision, so how often should children have eye examinations to make sure their eyes are healthy?

Every newborn undergoes a brief eye examination shortly after birth, mainly to ensure that no birth defects of the eye are present. This is usually performed by a pediatrician, family physician, nurse practitioner, or a physician's assistant. A similar examination should take place between six and twelve months of age, usually during a well-child check-up with a pediatrician or family physician. A primary goal of this second examination is to ensure that light can enter the eye unobstructed, so that vision will develop normally. This is evaluated by shining a light into the eye and observing a red or orange glow, called a red reflex, in the pupil of the eye—similar to the red eye often seen in photographs taken using a flash. Any problems that prevent light from entering the eye—such as extreme far-sightedness, crossed eyes, or even a cataract—can prevent normal vision development, a condition called amblyopia, or lazy eye.



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Once a child reaches age 2 ½ to 3 ½, and certainly by the age of 5, a vision screening should take place to make sure that vision is developing normally. Children in this age group are preparing to enter pre-school or kindergarten, and this examination is a good check for school readiness. This examination can be done during a well-child visit to the pediatrician or family physician, but should include some measurement of the child's vision. Most children this age cannot read the letters on the eye chart, but special vision-testing charts—including some with easy-to-recognize pictures—are available for children this age. Because vision is vulnerable

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to amblyopia in this age group, a formal examination by an eye care specialist should take place if the pediatrician is unable to perform testing, or if the test results are in any way abnormal. Some children in this age group have high degrees of near-sightedness or far-sightedness, and need glasses to help their vision develop normally.

If all of the examinations through age 5 are normal, it is not necessary to have any more routine screening eye examinations unless there are specific vision problems. Most children will undergo one or more vision screenings in elementary school, providing additional opportunities to identify vision problems. In some cases, these screenings may consist of a special photograph that can identify children who are near-sighted, far-sighted, or both, or who have misaligned eyes (called strabismus). All of these conditions can cause amblyopia, which can be treated if it is identified during the critical vision development period that lasts until children are about 10 years old. **While it is not absolutely necessary, a routine eye examination should be considered in the mid-teens, to ensure that vision is adequate to begin driving.**