

Bright Future Ahead for Pre-Kindergartener after Failed Vision Screening



Christian

Christian, age 4, never struggled in school or complained about having trouble seeing his classwork. In fact, he passed the vision screening at his yearly doctor's appointment. Just a few months later, however, he failed the free Prevent Blindness Georgia (PBGA) vision screening offered at his Gwinnett County preschool. His certified screener found that Christian was having trouble seeing at a distance with his left eye.

Christian's mom took her son to a pediatric ophthalmologist, who diagnosed him with amblyopia, myopia, and astigmatism! Without early treatment, these conditions may have ultimately resulted in permanent vision loss. Christian started wearing glasses and an eye patch to strengthen his weaker eye. His grateful mom explains that "he is a more confident learner" and "[she] always knew he was handsome but his glasses add something special!" Christian is now "vision ready" to learn and succeed in school.

Christian is just one of tens of thousands of children that PBGA vision screens each year. On average, one child in every classroom has a vision problem – but most young children do not know that they are seeing differently than others. During the last school year, PBGA vision screened nearly 32,000 children in 88 Georgia counties. Approximately 8% of all children screened are referred to an eye care professional for further examination. To learn more about these and other sight-saving services provided by PBGA, visit www.pbga.org.

How was my child screened?

Your child's vision may have been tested with a traditional eye chart or with a computer-aided photoscreener called plusoptiX. The eye chart tests visual acuity – your child tells us what he/she sees. The plusoptiX takes several photographs and measurements of your child's eyes to identify risk factors for amblyopia. The screening is non-invasive and very quick. Photos are taken only of the child's eyes. All children are also observed by the screener for signs and symptoms of vision problems. **Regardless of the screening method used, if your child fails the screening, schedule an eye exam and take the Referral Letter and Screening Results to your child's appointment.**

Signs of Possible Eye Trouble in Children

If you observe any of these signs, take your child to the eye doctor right away!

What do your child's eyes look like?

- Eyelid(s) do not open fully
- One eye turns in or out
- Eyelids are red-rimmed, crusted or swollen
- Eyes are watery, red or inflamed

What does your child say?

- Eyes are itchy, burning or scratchy
- Feels dizzy, nauseous or has headache
- Sees double or has blurry vision

How does your child act?

- Rubs eyes often
- Closes or covers one eye
- Thrusts head forward or holds head in an unusual way
- Has trouble doing close-up work
- Holds objects close to eyes to see
- Blinks a lot, squints or frowns
- Bumps into things within range of sight

Remember, your child may not complain about a vision problem and you may not be able to recognize symptoms.



Visit www.pbga.org

Suite 200
739 West Peachtree Street
Atlanta, GA 30308-1137
404-266-2020 tel
404-266-0860 fax

Did your child fail the vision screening?

Eye Doctor Stresses Importance of Follow-Up Exam

Each year, eye doctors see children with vision loss that might have been preventable if their eye problem had been detected and managed earlier in childhood. Some of these children never had a vision screening, and some that failed the vision screening never received a follow up eye exam. **It is extremely important to catch childhood vision problems early because it is not possible to undo a condition called amblyopia later in life.** Each year, Prevent Blindness Georgia vision screens thousands of preschool-aged children to help identify those at risk for amblyopia.

What is amblyopia? Amblyopia is a condition that develops in childhood and, if untreated, causes permanent vision loss. Although amblyopia usually affects only one eye, it can affect both eyes in some children. Many people do not realize that children are not born with normal vision. When a child is born, the child's brain "learns to see" by having normal visual experiences. Although the most important time period for visual development is during the first three months of life, the brain continues to "learn to see" for about the first seven or eight years of life. During that time period if, for some reason, the child does not have a normal visual experience in one or both eyes, the brain will not "learn to see" with that eye. In some cases, vision in the eye with amblyopia will be only mildly reduced. In other cases, the visual impairment can be severe.

What conditions cause amblyopia? Any condition that prevents the eye from having a normal visual experience can lead to amblyopia. The most common causes are strabismus (abnormal alignment of the two eyes), refractive errors (focusing problems) such as myopia (near-sightedness), hyperopia (far-sightedness) and astigmatism, ptosis (droopy eyelids) and cataracts. Yes! Children can get them.

Why is it important to identify amblyopia early?

Amblyopia can only be treated while visual development is ongoing. Visual development is essentially complete by age

seven or eight. Once the brain has reached visual maturity, amblyopia becomes much more difficult and, in some cases, impossible to treat. It is best to detect and treat amblyopia as early as possible. It is even better to prevent it by identifying and treating the conditions that cause amblyopia.

How can vision screening help? Vision screening is a cost effective, child friendly, essentially risk free approach to detecting conditions in children that can lead to amblyopia.

What happens if my child did not pass the vision screening or was not cooperative for the screening?

If your child did not pass the vision screening, it is very important to take your child to an eye doctor who has experience examining children. Your eye doctor will perform a comprehensive eye examination to determine if there is a problem that needs to be treated. In some cases, the eye doctor will simply reassure you that no problem has been detected. In other cases, if a problem is detected, treatment will be necessary. Most times, the treatment will consist of prescription eyeglasses and/or patching. If your child did not cooperate for the screening, it is important to repeat the screening or to see an eye doctor who has experience examining children.

What if my child failed the screening, but my primary care provider says the eyes look okay?

It is not sufficient simply to return to your primary care provider. Although most primary care providers may be able to screen for vision problems, diagnosing vision issues requires special equipment and techniques that are not available in your primary care provider's office.



Phoebe Lenhart, M.D.
Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology
Emory University School of Medicine

Children at high risk for vision disorders

Regardless of screening result, the following children should see an eye doctor:

Those with known neurodevelopmental disorders:

- Hearing impairment
- Down syndrome
- Autism spectrum disorders
- Speech delay

- Cognitive impairment
- Motor abnormalities (ex. cerebral palsy)

And those:

- With systemic diseases (ex. diabetes)
- With a family history of strabismus
- Using medications known to cause eye disorders
- Born prematurely
- Suspected by parent or guardian to have a vision problem
- Who are untestable and cannot be rescreened with 6 months

Visit www.gakids2020.org to learn more about children's vision health and eye health resources.



Children's Vision Georgia

2016-2017