



By Dr Debra Bartholomew

Good vision improves educational outcomes

In 1998, Lion Clubs International launched Lions World Sight Day to draw attention to the plight of sight loss, in the countries of the third-world. In 2000, the IAPB supported the initiative and integrated World Sight Day into its programme VISION 2020.

The IAPB now partners with numerous bodies, including WHO to commemorate World Sight Day, on the second Thursday of October ever since.

This year, the campaign for World Sight Day is to #Loveyoureyes. But why is eye health and vision so important? Vision and eye-related problems can significantly impact a child's wellbeing, even affecting their overall behaviour and development at school. There are over 165 million children who are short-sighted worldwide. These numbers are expected to rise due to increasing screen time exposure globally, especially since the pandemic. Glasses can actually reduce the odds of falling at school by up to 44 per cent.

The importance of vision screening

Vision screening is defined as "an efficient and cost-effective method to identify children with visual impairment or eye conditions that are likely to lead to vision loss, so that a referral can be made to an appropriate eye care professional for further evaluation and treatment."

Vision screening in children

Vision screening is most effective when performed periodically, throughout childhood. The earlier a problem is detected, the better the chance to obtain maximal vision through appropriate treatment. The first vision screening takes place in the newborn nursery when the doctor or practitioner inspects the

newborn's eye, pupil and red reflex.

Vision screening should be performed periodically through childhood and into the teenage years. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, screening should occur at birth through to 30 months, and then at:

- Ages 3, 4, 5, 6
- Ages 8, 10, 12
- Age 15

Vision screening in adults

It is recommended that all adults have a complete eye examination at the age of 40. It represents the time when age-related changes in vision and the earliest signs of eye diseases can be detected. Not everyone should wait until age 40, however. Persons with family history such as glaucoma, should have screening prior to age 40.

How do we LOVE OUR EYES in our nation?

We can review, refocus and re-establish vision screening in schools. Parents and teachers need to be educated about the importance of vision screening. A child with a refractive error may be mislabelled as disruptive, lazy or lacking focus.

But how can I make a difference?

One month ago, I approached the administration of my son's school, Queen's Royal College to begin vision screening of the whole Form one year, eventually extending to encompass the entire school population.

Together with the Trinidad Eye Hospital, it is hoped that this endeavour be accepted and rolled out to even more schools within Port-of-Spain and environs. So let's follow the four P's...Prevent, protect, prioritise and preserve!

Let's love our eyes!