



## For Immediate Release

### **Beware this Halloween! Canada's vision health professionals warn that cosmetic contact lenses can lead to irreversible vision loss**

OTTAWA (October 18, 2016) - Canada's vision health professionals, which include optometrists, ophthalmologists, and opticians, remind Canadians to be mindful of potential risks to their eyes at this time of year when wearing cosmetic contact lenses as part of a Halloween costume. The Canadian Ophthalmological Society (COS), the Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) and the Opticians Association of Canada (OAC) recommend that Canadians do not use non-corrective cosmetic contact lenses due to the serious and sometimes irreversible vision loss they can cause.

"Decorative contact lenses can put people at risk for bacterial infections, allergic reactions, or significant damage to the eye's capacity to function, with the potential for irreversible sight loss. CAO recommends talking to your eye doctor first and obtaining a prescription before putting these medical devices on your eyes" says Dr. Barry Thienes, President of the Canadian Association of Optometrists.

Cosmetic contact lenses can pose a particular risk. Cosmetic contacts sold at Halloween often cover a larger portion of the eye. These lenses do not correct vision but change the colour and appearance of the eye for dramatic effect. They can be particularly problematic because they are more difficult to remove than other lenses. They do not have the same level of oxygen permeability as other lenses and all the risks associated with corneal oxygen deprivation are multiplied many times over. Inflammation and ulceration can develop quickly and could result in permanent damage to the eye and to vision.

"As an eye physician and surgeon, I often have to treat the damage caused by non-corrective cosmetic contact lenses, including corneal ulcers which can lead to permanent vision loss," says Dr. Guillermo Rocha, MD, FRCS(C), President of the Canadian Ophthalmological Society.

"Contact lenses should not be thought of as fashion accessories or makeup – they are medical devices that require a prescription from an eye care professional. The eyes are one of the most delicate and important parts of the body, so what you put in and on them must be medically safe".

Todd Smith, President of the Opticians Association of Canada notes "It is no coincidence that all eye health care professionals are in agreement here. Contact lenses absolutely need to be fit by a licensed professional, the risks of injury are too great to ignore."



Complications that may result in vision loss include:

- Scratches on the cornea from a poor fit
- Eye infection from improper use and handling
- Either of the above from inferior materials used to make the devices

CAO, COS and OAC commend the Federal Ministry of Health and Health Canada on their decision to advance regulations that will require the same medical device safety standards for non-corrective or 'cosmetic' contact lenses as prescription or corrective contact lenses, in accordance with Private Member's Bill C-313, *An Act to Amend the Food and Drugs Act (non-corrective contact lenses)*. All three organizations have supported legislative change for many years pertaining to cosmetic contact lenses. In July 2016, Health Canada announced that cosmetic contact lenses will be regulated as Class II medical devices, similar to corrective contact lenses. This means manufacturers of non-corrective contact lenses will have to apply for a medical device license to sell the products in Canada. As well, importers and distributors of the products will be required to obtain a medical device establishment license.

The coming into force of these regulations has been delayed until July 2017 in order to meet Canada's obligations on technical barriers to trade, and to allow manufacturers of non-corrective contact lenses to bring their operations into compliance with the new requirements.

Due to the risk of harm posed by non-corrective contact lenses, Canada's vision health professionals maintain that their use should require a prescription from an authorized professional. A prescription and proper instructions as to the use and care of cosmetic contact lenses will help to minimize the public health risks posed by these medical devices.

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To learn more: [www.cos-sco.ca](http://www.cos-sco.ca) [www.opto.ca](http://www.opto.ca) [www.opticians.ca](http://www.opticians.ca)

### **About the Canadian Association of Optometrists**

The Canadian Association of Optometrists is the national voice of optometry and is dedicated to collaboratively advancing the highest standard of primary eye care through the promotion of optimal vision and eye health, in partnership with all Canadians.



### **About the Canadian Ophthalmological Society**

The Canadian Ophthalmological Society is the national public authority on eye care in Canada, representing eye physicians and surgeons from every province and territory, and advocating for improved vision care policies and standards in Canada, and around the world.

### **About the Opticians Association of Canada**

The Opticians Association of Canada is a professional association representing Licensed Opticians in Canada. Our mission is to promote Licensed Opticians and the profession; to develop and maintain a professional standard of knowledge and proficiency in our occupational field, and to educate and inform vision care consumers about matters related to their eye health.

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