

# Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



August 2004

## August is Cataract Awareness Month

Each August, the American Academy of Ophthalmology sponsors Cataract Awareness Month to raise awareness about this common, but potentially serious, disease of the eye. Approximately 20.5 million Americans have cataracts.

Poor vision from cataracts affects 60 percent of all adults over age 60. Although most cataracts occur in older adults as a result of the aging process, they may also occur in younger people as a result of injury, certain diseases, heredity or medications.

Cataracts are a significant cause of blindness in some parts of the world, however, in the United States cataracts don't usually lead to blindness because of the availability of corrective procedures.

### What is a Cataract?

A cataract is formed when the clear lens of the eye becomes cloudy and hardens. When this occurs, light rays have difficulty passing through the lens and vision becomes blurry. A cataract is painless and usually develops gradually over months or years. Common symptoms of cataracts include:

- Painless blurring of vision
- Sensitivity to light and glare
- Double vision in one eye
- Poor night vision
- Fading or yellowing of colors

- Frequent changes in glasses or contact lens prescription

### Can I Prevent a Cataract?

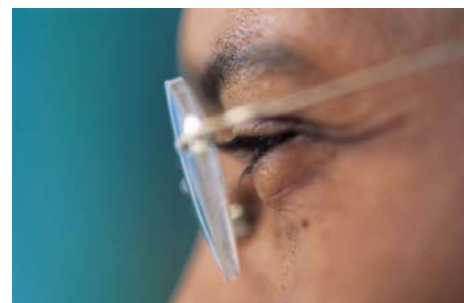
You may be able to prevent or delay the onset of cataracts by protecting your eyes from ultraviolet radiation commonly found in sunlight. To protect your eyes, wear sunglasses with 100 percent UVA and UVB protection and a hat with a brim when you go outside.

Preliminary studies also indicate you may be able to prevent or delay cataract formation by eating foods rich in antioxidants—such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and vegetable oils.

### How Are Cataracts Treated?

Cataract treatment may vary depending on the symptoms and the age of the patient. Initially, an ophthalmologist (eye doctor) may do nothing or prescribe stronger glasses. As the disease progresses and starts to interfere with the patient's normal activities such as driving, watching TV, reading or walking, the ophthalmologist may recommend surgery.

Cataract surgery is the most common surgical procedure in the United States. Each year over a million Americans have surgery to remove cataracts. Although no surgery is without risks, cataract surgery has a high success rate. Over 95 percent of



people who receive cataract surgery have significantly improved vision with no complications. The procedure involves removing the cloudy lens and replacing it with an artificial lens.

### For More Information

If you think you may have a cataract, contact your eye doctor. For more information on cataracts, go to the American Academy of Ophthalmology's website at <http://www.aao.org/aao/patients/eyemd/cataract.cfm>

# August is National Immunization Awareness Month



The National Partnership for Immunization (NPI) has designated August as National Immunization Awareness Month. As kids prepare to go back to school and the flu season approaches, now is the time to make sure that you and your family are up-to-date on your immunizations.

## Why Immunize?

Health experts believe that it is always better to prevent a disease than to treat it. Disease prevention is essential to public health and immunizations are an important part of controlling the spread of diseases. By keeping up-to-date on recommended vaccines, you can protect yourself, your family, and your community from serious, life-threatening infections.

Vaccines save lives by helping to prevent many infectious diseases

including smallpox, polio, measles, mumps, tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough. Vaccines have eliminated smallpox worldwide and polio in the United States, and have significantly reduced the number of cases of measles, whooping cough and other diseases.

However, in spite of these achievements, tens of thousands of Americans still die from these and other vaccine-preventable diseases. Furthermore, vaccine-preventable diseases can be expensive to treat. These diseases can result in doctor's visits, hospitalizations, lost time from work, and premature deaths.

## Who should be immunized?

Getting immunized is a lifelong, life-protecting community effort for people of all ages, sexes, races and ethnic backgrounds. Health professionals recommend that

vaccinations begin soon after birth and continue throughout a person's life.

Most vaccines are given to children during the first five or six years of their lives because children are particularly vulnerable to infections. Parents of children entering kindergarten must provide proof to their school that their children have been immunized against a variety of diseases.

Other immunizations or boosters are recommended for adolescents or adults. Some colleges and universities require proof of immunizations for entering freshmen.

Vaccines are also available for diseases that are common in other parts of the world. If you plan to travel outside of the United States, be sure to get any recommended vaccines for the countries you plan to visit.

Ask your doctor which vaccines are recommended for you and your family. CHP covers most immunizations for children up to age 13 and covers annual influenza vaccines for children and adults.

For more information, visit the National Partnership for Immunization website at: [www.partnersforimmunization.org](http://www.partnersforimmunization.org).

## Preliminary Renewal Meeting Scheduled

The County Health Pool's (CHP's) preliminary renewal meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 12 at 10:00 a.m. The meeting will take place at CTSI's 800 Grant Street office in Denver.

The CHP Board will review and analyze the costs and benefits of the first six months of the 2004 plan year. The Board will also

discuss any changes for the 2005 plan year.

The CHP Board will make a final determination about the plan and the rates for the 2005 plan year at the CHP renewal meeting in September.

CHP encourages member entities to attend both meetings.