



OFFICE OF THE LT. GOVERNOR
EVELYN SANGUINETTI

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Lieutenant Governor Sanguinetti Warns the Public About the Dangers of Cosmetic Colored Contact Lenses

CHICAGO — With the Halloween season upon us, the Lieutenant Governor Evelyn Sanguinetti has joined forces with the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR) to remind the public that purchasing colored contact lenses from anyone other than a licensed eye care professional or pharmacist is dangerous.

In recent years, illegally-purchased colored contacts have flooded the retail market during Halloween and are most often found at malls, beauty supply stores and via online websites. These lenses are often made overseas in non-FDA approved facilities with tinting materials that may be toxic to the eye. Without a proper examination and fitting, colored contacts can cause damage to the eye, including blindness.

“As a mother of three children, I can’t imagine what I would do if one of my kids gets hurt from wearing these decorative contact lenses,” Sanguinetti said. “I urge all parents to be vigilant of what their children are wearing this Halloween. These types of contacts are sold illegally and can cause serious damage to the eyes, including blindness.”

“Decorative contacts surge in popularity every year around the Halloween season as a fashion or costume accessory,” said Bryan A. Schneider, IDFPR Secretary.

“Unfortunately, both children and adults alike often neglect to realize that these lenses are classified as medical devices that pose the same potential safety and health issues as corrective lenses. As regulators, it is important that we remind consumers of the unnecessary dangers of infection from over-the-counter colored contacts made from potentially unsafe materials.”

IDFPR licenses an estimated 2,300 optometrists and hundreds of ophthalmologists in Illinois. Many have reported seeing patients who have suffered from infections or corneal scratches as a result of contact lens problems. Because contact lenses sit directly on the cornea and could potentially limit the amount of oxygen reaching the eye, all contact lenses pose some risk to wearers. By requiring lenses to be fitted and sold by professionals, that risk is limited and managed.

In addition to scratches from ill-fitting lenses, bacteria build within the eye very rapidly and can cause infections. Some types of bacteria can cause permanent scarring within twenty hours of the outbreak, if left untreated. While the infection may look like pinkeye, an easily treated eye infection, contact lenses can cause eye ulcers which must be treated with strong antibiotic medicine. If left untreated, ulcers can cause partial or total irreversible blindness.

“While there are a number of concerns, the risk of infection is among the highest,” said Dr. Christine Allison, Illinois Optometric Association President. “Mild to severe bacterial infections can ravage the eye resulting in major ramifications.” Dr. Allison reminds parents that, “all contact lenses are considered a medical device and should be prescribed by their Optometrist.”

Because the health risk is serious and most of the customers seeking cosmetic contact lenses are teens and young adults, IDFPR is partnering with the Illinois State Board of Education and the Department of Public Health to alert teachers, administrators and health care professionals in every school district and county in the state about the serious health and vision problems facing young people and warning signs to look for in their students and patients.

Sales of contact lenses to consumers without a valid prescription are considered the unlicensed practice of optometry and subject to cease and desist orders and civil fines of up to \$10,000. Illinois residents are encouraged to notify state officials if they see lenses for sale at retail outlets that do not require a prescription from a licensed eye-care professional. Consumers can file complaints at www.idfpr.com or by calling our consumer hotline number at 1-888-4REGUL8 (1-888-473-4858).