

Keep an eye on children's vision

Do not ignore even the slightest discomfort a child complains of: doctors

Afshan Yasmeen

BANGALORE: Did you know that more than 30 per cent of children aged less than six in Karnataka suffer from vision impairment such as refractive errors and squint? This is because parents tend to ignore their children's complaints of eye discomfort in the mistaken belief that the child is too young to have vision problems, say doctors.

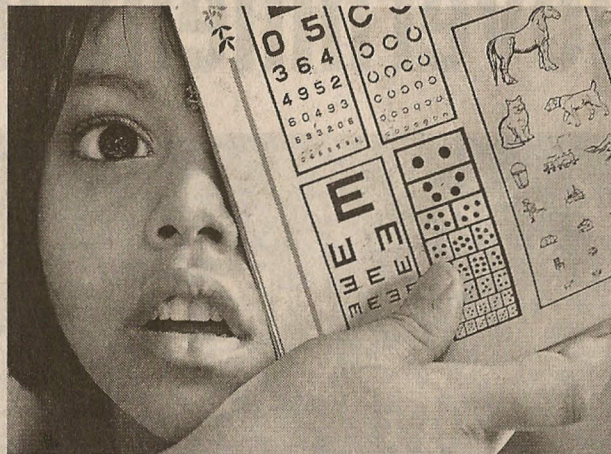
With most children addicted to electronic play stations and computer games rather than playing outdoors, eye problems have become common.

If detected early and treated on time, most of them could be saved from vision defects.

So do not ignore even the slightest visual discomfort of your child, say ophthalmologists. With August being observed as Children's Eye Health and Safety Month the world over, ophthalmologists feel that the need of the hour is a concerted move to prevent blindness and conditions that could lead to vision impairments in children.

Study statistics

According to a study by the State-run Minto Institute of



CARE NEEDED: *With computer games becoming popular, eye problems are common among children.* – FILE PHOTO: A. ROY CHOWDURY

Ophthalmology, 10.5 per cent of children in the age group of 10 to 15 studying in 20 government and Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike schools in Bangalore South have eye problems.

Doctors from the hospital screened 2,500 students of these schools during the past one year.

"Of these, at least 263 students had vision defects, mainly refractive errors and squint," Hospital Medical Superintendent and HoD (Ophthalmology) K.S. Sri Prakash

told *The Hindu*.

Doctors of the hospital conduct eye-screening programmes in at least four or five Government schools every month.

"After detecting the problems, we prescribe glasses and medicine at the school itself. Those who need advanced treatment come to the hospital," he said.

Pointing out that any eye problem can be corrected if detected at an early stage, Dr. Prakash said: "The growth of the eyeball stops at the age of

• 'Eye injury is the main cause of blindness'

• 'Certificate should be made compulsory for admission'

eight. Even the slightest visual discomfort that a child complains about should not be ignored because delay in treatment can result in permanent eye defects or even loss of vision."

Teachers should be trained to screen children for eye problems so that any defect can be detected by the time they reach the age of six.

As eye injury is the main cause of blindness in children, the Government should regulate bursting of crackers during festivals, Dr Prakash said.

Paediatric ophthalmologist and squint specialist Arun Samprathi said that problems such as squint too could be corrected if detected within the age of eight.

Pointing out that a certificate from an ophthalmologist is a must at the time of school admission in western countries, Dr. Samprathi said that the Government should

adopt a similar procedure.

Asserting that addiction to indoor computer games is harmful, he said that parents should encourage their children to play outdoors.

"Children should not be allowed to sit in front of the computer for more than an hour as glaring at the screen for long will definitely strain the eyes. Parents should speak to children about eye safety," he said.

As a majority of sports injuries affect the eye, parents should ensure that children wear protective gear for the eye while participating in certain type of sports.

They should also see to it that children play with toys appropriate for their age. Toys with remote controls and sharp or protruding parts should be avoided, Dr. Samprathi said.

Narayana Nethralaya chairman K. Bhujang Shetty said that parents should get their child's vision tested at the age of three.

To mark the Child Eye Health and Safety month Narayana Nethralaya organised a training programme for parents on to how to rehabilitate infants with vision problems by adopting lifestyle changes.