

For some, darkness follows Deepavali

By Sahana Charan

BANGALORE, NOV. 9. The festival of lights is round the corner and people are splurging on clothes and crackers and getting into the mood for celebration. But, for some, the festive season is often a step into the world of darkness because of lack of precautions while lighting fire-crackers.

Every year, several children and adults are involved in fire accidents during Deepavali. Many of them suffer eye injuries. Despite this, people do not take simple precautions while celebrating the festival.

Boys between 10 and 16 years of age are most prone to eye injuries caused by crackers. A few adults are also among victims. Last year in Bangalore, 50 to 60 eye injury cases caused by fire-crackers were reported. Many of those injured had severe injuries and some lost vision. One person admitted to the Minto Eye Hospital developed a condition called 'hyphema,' in which blood accumulated in his right eye.

In the Narayana Nethralaya, about 30 cases were treated, the hospital authorities said. Cases of dust from crackers entering the eye are common. "These apart, a majority of children who are brought to us have eye injuries caused by burning 'rockets' or sparklers," says Arun Samprathi, paediatric ophthalmologist at the Narayana Nethralaya.

Dr. Samprathi warns that crackers can cause major damage. Some of the common injuries caused by firecrackers



— Photo: Sampath Kumar G.P.

include burns on the eyelid, conjunctival and corneal burns, and bleeding inside the eyeballs which causes retinal damage.

"Severe damage to the retina and cornea may lead to permanent loss of vision. Last year, three children lost their eyesight owing to fireworks," he says.

Dr. Samprathi says it is ad-

visable to wear protective goggles to prevent eye injuries. "Rockets and flowerpots are the crackers that cause the most injuries and they have to be handled carefully.

Sparklers also need to be handled with care as they burn at a high temperature. Always wear gloves while holding a

sparkler, and never give one to a child under 5 years of age," he adds.

Emergency services

The following hospitals will have 24-hour eye clinics from November 11 to 14 for handling emergencies: Narayana Nethralaya, Chord Road, 23373311;

DOS AND DON'TS

- Children should use fireworks under supervision of adults.
- Light firecrackers outdoors, away from houses, dry leaves and flammable material.
- Keep a bucket of water ready to put out fires.
- Don't try to relight firecrackers. Pour water on duds.
- Before lighting crackers, make sure no one is standing nearby.
- Never ignite fireworks in a container.
- Store them in a cool and dry place.
- Don't experiment with homemade fireworks.
- Don't wear loose clothing while lighting crackers. Wear cotton clothes. Avoid synthetic material.

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