



No rest for the weary eyes: A pandemic of increased near-vision use for Canadian children¹ – CooperVision survey

Optimal children's eye health will require summer outdoor activities, less near work and regular check-ins.

TORONTO, JUNE 28, 2021 – While the horizon of a return to normal seems less distant, a new survey by CooperVision Canada and Maru/Blue¹ suggests that the pandemic may have generated near-vision habits, which according to experts could have an impact on the eye health of Canadian children, including myopia². More commonly called nearsightedness, myopia is the inability to see objects clearly at a distance and can be worsened by the overuse of near vision³ and the lack of natural light⁴. There are things parents and children can do to make sure those pandemic vision habits don't stick.

Near vision activities include things like prolonged time spent on screens, reading or writing. According to the survey, nearly six-in-ten (59 per cent) Canadian parents reported their children under 14 were spending more time doing activities that require their near vision compared to before the pandemic¹. Among them, 27 per cent even indicated this extra time exceeded five hours a day, while nearly half (47 per cent) said their children would spend an extra three to four hours a day on nearsighted activities^{5†}. While near vision has been associated with higher incidences of developing myopia³, the changes in lifestyle and screen consumption resulting from the pandemic could pose long-term concerns for Canadian children's eye health².

“Since the pandemic, children have been spending more time inside relying on their near vision more and more for everyday activities, including online learning, connecting with friends and family and entertainment. As the pandemic and this dependency on online activities persists, we are finding that these activities may be contributing to eye strain and possibly resulting in myopia. What we should make sure of, is that these new near-vision habits do not become the new norm,” said Dr. Debbie Jones, Clinical Professor of Optometry at the University of Waterloo and Clinical Scientist at the Centre for Ocular Research & Education. “While late or undetected childhood myopia can lead to even bigger problems later in life⁶ such as cataracts, glaucoma and retinal degeneration⁷, it can be difficult for parents to spot symptoms of myopia early on, as children would have no point of comparison to be able to tell if they are not seeing well,” added Jones.

Myopia needs to be managed on an ongoing basis and it starts with playing outside more⁴

Eye care professionals recommend monitoring eye health in children at regular intervals, starting as young as six months old, before they start school and annually⁸. However, the survey revealed that a little over half (55 per cent) of Canadian parents get their children's vision checked at least once a year. An additional 20 per cent reported having their children's eyes monitored every two or more years, and 24 per cent have never had their child's vision checked^{1†}.

Not surprisingly, four-in-ten (42 per cent) Canadian parents surveyed by Maru/Blue for CooperVision also agreed their children are spending less time outside compared to prior to the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁺. This is a contributing concern for their eye health, according to experts, who point to the lack of outdoor time due to quarantine as another environmental factor leading to myopia⁹.

“The human body was not designed for us to only use our vision inside,” added Jones. “Spending time outside is encouraged as it has been shown to have a preventative effect and can delay the onset of myopia⁴, this should be easier now that the summer is here! Engaging children in outdoor activities that do not involve using their near vision, making sure they keep a reasonable distance from their books, tablets or TVs, and ensuring they take regular breaks are good first steps to help prevent early symptoms. While using regular eyeglasses and contact lenses can help children see distance objects clearly, these will not slow down the progression of their myopia. Myopia can worsen over time and worsen if appropriate interventions are delayed¹⁰, so it is crucial to monitor children’s eyes with regular eye examinations from a young age and enroll in a trusted myopia management program to help reduce its progression.”

Survey Methodology

An online survey of 509 Canadian parents with child(ren) at home under 14 years old was completed between May 7th and May 11th, 2021, using Maru/Blue’s online panel. For comparison purposes, a probability sample of this size has an estimated margin of error (which measures sampling variability) of +/- 3%, 19 times out of 20.

About CooperVision

CooperVision, a division of CooperCompanies (NYSE:COO), is one of the world’s leading manufacturers of contact lenses. The company produces a full array of daily disposable, two-week and monthly soft contact lenses that feature advanced materials and optics, and premium rigid gas permeable lenses for orthokeratology and scleral designs. CooperVision has a strong heritage of addressing the toughest vision challenges such as astigmatism, presbyopia, childhood myopia, and highly irregular corneas; and offers the most complete portfolio of spherical, toric and multifocal products available. Through a combination of innovative products and focused practitioner support, the company brings a refreshing perspective to the marketplace, creating real advantages for customers and wearers. For more information, visit www.coopervision.ca.

About CooperCompanies

CooperCompanies (“Cooper”) is a global medical device company public traded on NYSE (NYSE: COO). Cooper operates through two business units, CooperVision and CooperSurgical. CooperVision brings a refreshing perspective on vision care with a commitment to developing a wide range of high-quality products for contact lens wearers and providing focused practitioner support. CooperSurgical is committed to advancing the health of women, babies and families with its diversified portfolio of products and services focusing on medical devices and fertility & genomics. Headquartered in San Ramon, Calif., Cooper has a workforce of more than 12,000 with products sold in over 100 countries. For more information, please visit coopercos.com.

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✚ Additionally, nearly half (47 per cent) reported their children spend an additional three to four hours per day on near-vision activities since prior to the pandemic, and another 26 per cent said their children were spending just under two additional hours doing so.

✚ Of those, 13 per cent said they are planning on doing it soon, 9 per cent said they will have their children's vision checked only if they display some symptoms, and 2 per cent reported they have no plan to do so.

References

¹ CooperVision data on file 2021. Children Myopia Awareness, Maru/Blue online panel survey 5/7/21 to 5/11/21 of n=509 parents (with children under 14) in Canada

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³ Huang HM, Chang DS, Wu PC. The Association between Near Work Activities and Myopia in Children-A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *PLoS One.* 2015 Oct 20;10(10):e0140419. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0140419. PMID: 26485393; PMCID: PMC4618477.

⁴ Xiong S, Sankaridurg P, Naduvilath T, Zang J, Zou H, Zhu J, Lv M, He X, Xu X. Time spent in outdoor activities in relation to myopia prevention and control; a meta-analysis and systematic review. *Acta Ophthalmol.* 2017;95(6):551-566.

⁵ CooperVision data on file 2021. Children Myopia Awareness, Maru/Blue online panel survey 5/7/21 to 5/11/21 of n=311 parents (with children under 14) in Canada

⁶ Flitcroft DI. The complex interactions of retinal, optical and environmental factors in myopia aetiology. *Prog Retin Eye Res.* 2012 Nov;31(6):622-60. doi: 10.1016/j.preteyeres.2012.06.004. Epub 2012 Jul 4. PMID: 22772022.

⁷ Bourne RR, et al. Causes of vision loss worldwide, 1990-2010: a systemic analysis. *Lancet Glob Health.* 2013;1(6):e339-49.

⁸ Canadian Association of Optometrist website, <https://opto.ca/health-library/frequency-of-eye-examinations>.

⁹ Klaver CCW, Polling JR, Enthoven CA. 2020 as the Year of Quarantine Myopia. *JAMA Ophthalmol.* 2021;139(3):300–301. doi:10.1001/jamaophthalmol.2020.6231

¹⁰ Ocular Surgery News: Concern for Myopia Progression Increases with Alarming Rise in Global Prevalence. Retrieved October 29, 2019 from <https://www.healio.com/news/ophthalmology/20160614/concern-for-myopia-progression-increases-with-alarming-rise-in-global-prevalence>