

Proper Vision & Hearing Identification for Schools

The **Ontario Association of Optometrists** (OAO) and the **Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists** (OSLA) are urging all Ontario educators to ensure that every child in Ontario starting school is healthy and ready to learn.

To reach their potential, all children require good vision and hearing that has been assessed by a regulated health professional at the optimal time.

Vision

As many as one in four children (25%) has a vision problem. Unfortunately, each year, thousands of children start school without ever having an eye exam. Children with amblyopia, are a particular concern, as they need to be identified early and treatment started before vision loss becomes permanent.

Children who cannot see the board, focus on a picture or follow words in a book may struggle to achieve their full learning potential. Vision problems can also impact their hand-eye coordination for physical activities and even impact their social development.

The **Ontario Association of Optometrists** recommends that children have a comprehensive eye examination by an optometrist at 6 – 9 months of age, at 3 years of age, and then every 12 months or as recommended by the optometrist.

Vision screenings are not a substitute for an eye health exam. A vision screening does not assess the entire visual system, including the health of a child's eyes, and therefore many vision problems can be missed.

Through the Eye See...Eye Learn® program, funded in part by the Government of Ontario, OAO will help junior kindergarten students get the best start to learning. Local participating optometrists provide comprehensive eye examinations to junior kindergarten students. The eye exams are covered under provincial health insurance (OHIP). If the child requires a pair of glasses, they will receive a complimentary pair courtesy of our corporate partners and participating optometrists. This means that there is no out-of-pocket cost for the parents.

Hearing

3 out of 1,000 babies are born with hearing loss that may affect their speech, language, reading, writing, and social development. This can result in poor academic performance in children, behavioural issues in teenagers, and isolation, reduced independence, diminished cognitive function, and depression.

Early identification, accurate assessment and effective treatment of auditory disorders are essential to ensuring better outcomes for children.

The Ontario Infant Hearing Program (IHP) funded by the Ontario government tests all children soon after birth, and will follow a child if identified as having a hearing impairment up to the age of six.

Studies have shown that screening each and every child in school for hearing, often by non-regulated health professionals, results in too many students being improperly diagnosed.

Audiologists are the only regulated professionals that are exclusively trained in the prevention, identification, assessment, treatment and (re)habilitation of auditory disorders.

Therefore, in the interests of accuracy and safety, any parent who thinks their child may have a hearing problem should have that child evaluated by a clinical audiologist.



For more **information on children's vision** or to find an optometrist near you, visit www.optom.on.ca or call 1-800-540-3837.



For more **information on children's hearing** or to find an audiologist near you, visit www.osla.on.ca or call 1-800-718-6752.