

# Back to School: Does My Child Need a Comprehensive Eye Exam?

## Eye to Eye

## Clinical Notes for Healthcare Providers - Vol 1.5

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*As summer winds down and preparations for a new school year begin, for many children this means a return to the primary care provider for a back to school physical. For kids who wear glasses, this is also a common time of year to return to the eye doctor for a routine eye health checkup and an updated glasses prescription.*

Given the importance of good vision on school performance and behavior, it's natural for many parents (whose children do not wear glasses) to wonder whether their child needs a formal comprehensive eye exam, or if a screening test alone is sufficient.

Vision screening, when done properly, has been shown to be an effective & cost efficient way of identifying visually significant refractive error and detecting amblyopia, a potentially irreversible cause of permanent vision loss if not identified and treated at an early age. Vision screenings are typically done by schools and/or primary care offices, and generally can be performed in two broad categories: Optotype-based (e.g. reading letters, picture matching) or instrument-based (e.g. photoscreeners, autorefractors).

More details on these types of screening options including age-appropriate vision thresholds, as recommended by the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus, can be found online at the website listed in the reference section below.



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A comprehensive exam including a cycloplegic refraction by an experienced pediatric eye care provider is always recommended for children who fail a screening test. Additional reasons to consider referring children for a comprehensive eye exam include:

- Vision screening is inconclusive or cannot be performed.
- Squinting or atypical head positions with viewing.
- Difficulty seeing the board at school.
- Concerns about reading at age level.
- Frequent complaints of eyestrain or headache.
- Family history of glasses at similar age in parents or siblings.
- Strabismus detected in the office at any age or parental concerns of “drifting,” “wandering,” or “crossing” eyes.
- Concerns about learning disability, developmental delay, neuropsychological condition, or behavioral issue.
- If there is an underlying systemic condition that is known to be associated with eye problems (e.g. diabetes mellitus, hyperthyroidism, juvenile idiopathic arthritis, neurofibromatosis, Marfan syndrome, etc).
- Any other persistent visual concerns despite “passing” a screening.

### *How can you, as the primary physician, help manage this?*

It is critical that children undergo frequent age-appropriate vision screening in order to detect or prevent amblyopia before its development becomes irreversible. Be sure to incorporate vision care and eye checks as a part of your patient's routine medical care. Primary care providers should have a low threshold to refer, as identifying problems early can prevent a minor issue from becoming something more difficult to treat. Refer your patients for a comprehensive eye exam if they display any of the vision issues previously mentioned. An experienced pediatric eye clinic will perform a comprehensive eye exam that is typically enjoyable for kids, educational for parents, and informative to the medical care team.

### Reference:

1. AAPOS Vision Screening Recommendations: Techniques for Pediatric Vision Screening. [Available at]: <https://www.aapos.org/terms/conditions/131>