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**Eye Care and Vision - Unexpected Diseases An Eye Test Can Spot - Health and Safety:**  
(*Sight problems aside, eye examinations can detect a range of serious diseases.*)

**To: All Branches**

Dear Colleagues,

The CWU Health, Safety & Environment Department has continued supporting and working with the "Eyecare Trust" an organisation that campaigns to raise awareness about the need for regular eye tests and that the eyes can also give a clear view of what's occurring in other parts of the body. In fact, an eye test could reveal a life or death situation.

As well as detecting vision problems and eye diseases, such as glaucoma or macular degeneration, they can sometimes also reveal whether you're suffering from a number of serious health conditions. Getting an eye examination is a bit like getting a more extensive physical examination as there are a variety of eye and general health conditions that can be picked up in an eye examination that are essentially silent but highly treatable - if they're picked up early.

The "Eyecare Trust" states that poor uptake of sight tests is probably the biggest risk to the nation's eye health. Around 20 million people in the UK fail to have their sight tested once every two years, yet a simple sight test can detect glaucoma years before a person notices lost vision, and many childhood eye conditions which can be permanently corrected if diagnosed early enough. The "Eyecare Trust" is conveying the message that sight tests really are essential health checks.

### Did you know?

- 2 million people in the UK are living with sight loss that is severe enough to have a significant impact on their daily lives. Half of this sight loss is avoidable.
- A sight test can detect early signs of conditions like glaucoma, which can be treated if found soon enough.
- During a sight test, other health conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure may be detected.
- For healthy eyes, eat well, don't smoke and wear eye protection in bright sunlight.

Here's how a simple eye test could help detect other serious medical conditions and diseases:-

### Diabetes

Around 750,000 people in the UK have undiagnosed diabetes, according to Diabetes UK. Symptoms of Type 2 diabetes can creep up very slowly and are often dismissed as normal

tiredness, or just part of growing old, but cases can be diagnosed from eye tests. High blood-sugar related to diabetes can cause problems in the small blood vessels resulting in diabetic retinopathy, which can lead to blindness. An optometrist will be able to spot early characteristic changes, such as tiny leaks from damaged blood vessels. Nowhere are the blood vessels more important than in the retina at the back of the eye and Eyecare professionals have a window to look at this, and they can spot very early signs of diabetes and the effect it has on blood vessels in the back of the eye. The message is that you don't need to go blind with diabetes as it's treatable and the key is to pick it up early. Not only that, but the sooner diabetes is detected, the sooner it can be treated or managed, meaning other potential complications - including ulcers, kidney and heart damage - can be prevented too.

### **High blood pressure**

Effects of high blood pressure - a condition which affects one in three UK adults but is often symptomless, and is linked with stroke, heart disease and vascular dementia - can sometimes be seen inside the eye. This is because the force of blood passing through blood vessels in the retina can cause hypertensive retinopathy. Blood vessel walls may thicken, narrowing the vessels and restricting blood from reaching the retina. In some cases, it becomes swollen and its function is limited, and there may be bleeding behind the eye.

### **High cholesterol/Cardiovascular problems**

Because of the high blood flow at the back of the eye, excessive cholesterol - which is linked to cardiovascular problems - may also be spotted there, looking like deposits in the blood vessels. Changes in the patterns of ocular veins and arteries can also be linked to cardiovascular disease and stroke. Indications of strokes and other cardiovascular problems can be seen in the eyes. The back of the eye is part of the brain, so anything that can affect the brain can affect the eye - and often they affect the eye first.

### **Arthritis**

Although arthritis is characterised by joint inflammation, autoimmune forms of the disease (like rheumatoid arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis) can affect other parts of the body including the eyes, and the inflammation it causes can be spotted in eye tests. This inflammation (uveitis) is the same kind that can attack joints. It can slowly destroy the eye too. Arthritis is another one of the diseases where eye examinations are important, as the ocular manifestations can have grave consequences if left untreated.

### **Alzheimer's Disease**

Although not available yet, it's hoped that a simple eye test could soon be used to identify the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. Researchers are looking at whether warning signs can be detected using special computer software to analyse images of the eye. Researchers have reported that it will soon be possible to look into someone's eyes using an inexpensive machine and discover something which may suggest a risk of developing dementia. The research promises early warning in a non-invasive way, and the test, which will identify differences in the retinal vessels, may even be able to differentiate between different types of dementia.

### **Tumours**

The eye has a large blood supply relative to its size and for this reason, certain types of tumours can spread to the eye, as well as primary tumours developing there - although this is rare. Brain tumours can also be spotted in an eye test, sometimes through swelling of the optic nerve linked to pressure from the tumour.

### **Driving and Vision – Safety and Legal Responsibility!**

It's important to have your sight tested if you think you may have a problem with your eyesight, in fact, studies suggest that up to one in five middle aged drivers are taking to the road with their eyesight not as good as it should be. It is not just common sense to ensure your eyesight is good enough to enable you to drive comfortably, but your safety and that of

others is at risk and you will be breaking the law if it isn't. A driver of a car or motorbike must be able to read a number plate, with symbols, 79mm high by 50mm wide, from a distance of 20 metres AND a driver should have a visual acuity of at least 6/12 with both eyes open. This can be done with glasses or contact lenses if you usually wear them. The law also requires drivers to have a wide field of vision. Your optometrist will tell you if you may not meet the field of vision standard. Bus and Lorry drivers are required to have a higher standard of vision. If you are not able to do this, your insurance may be invalidated. Driving with uncorrected defective vision is an offence punishable with a heavy fine, penalty licence points and possible driving disqualification.

**National Eye Health Week 2018 (NEHW) - Vision Really Matters.**

This year's National Eye Health Week (NEHW) will take place from 24 to 30 September 2018, promoting the importance of eye health and the need for regular sight tests for all. Sight is the sense people fear losing the most, yet many of us don't know how to look after our eyes! Think about preparing for a local awareness raising campaign now. Further information will be published nearer the time.

**For more information visit:-** <http://www.eyecaretrust.org.uk/>

**Or Contact:-**

The Eyecare Trust  
PO Box 804  
Aylesbury  
Buckinghamshire  
HP20 9DF

**Tel:** 0845 129 5001

**Email:** [info@eyecaretrust.org.uk](mailto:info@eyecaretrust.org.uk)

(The Eyecare Trust is a registered charity that exists to raise awareness of all aspects of eye health and the importance of regular eye care. The Trust's public information and awareness raising campaigns are aimed at helping ensure that eye care is kept high on the UK public's health agenda and provides valuable advice and information.)

Attachment: Poster "Keep Calm And Get Your Eyes Checked"

Yours sincerely



**Dave Joyce**  
**National Health, Safety & Environment Officer**

**CWU Working with the Eyecare Trust**

