

# Promoting Eye Health at a Young Age

## Pediatric Specialist Joins Local Optometry Practice

By Mary Beth TeSelle  
Special to The Union

According to the Centers for Disease Control, just over half (51.9%) of children aged 3-5 years old have never had their vision tested by a doctor or other health professional. Eye experts say regularly seeing an eye doctor should be part of every child's health care plan.

"Children's eyes are constantly undergoing many changes during child development," says Tiffany Chan, OD, optometrist at Chan Family Optometry in Grass Valley. "It is important to assess any visual problems or diseases that may disrupt a child from reaching their greatest visual potential during their critical years of development."

Dr. Chan says that some vision problems can have a significant impact if left untreated.

"Poor eye health can cause a child to develop misaligned eyes and/or improper connections to the brain," she explains. "This can lead to 'lazy' eyes. Through an eye exam, doctors are able to rule out any risk factors a child may have and to determine proper treatment to prevent poor visual development."

Because of the importance of eye health in children, Dr. Chan and her team recently welcomed the area's first optometrist who specializes in pediatric eye health – Dr. Tina Khieu.

"We are thrilled to have Dr. Khieu join our practice," Dr. Chan says. "Many of the eye doctors in our area are knowledgeable about caring for patients of all ages, including children, but Dr. Khieu has pursued specialty training in this age group. This is an exciting time for our community to bring on board a doctor with a passion for pediatrics, and advanced knowledge about visual development."

While many parents may rely on the vision screening offered at their child's physical or through school as being a good indicator of their eye health, the American Optometric Association says that a vision screening can actually give a false sense of security. Such screenings only assess one or two areas of vision and may not evaluate how well the child can focus his or her eyes or how well the eyes work together.

In addition, screenings do not typically test color



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Experts recommend children undergo a thorough eye exam performed by an optometrist before they start school to ensure their eyes are healthy and that they don't need prescription glasses.

### SIGNS OF EYE AND VISION PROBLEMS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

According to the American Public Health Association, about 10% of preschoolers have eye or vision problems. However, children this age generally will not voice complaints about their eyes. Parents should watch for signs that may indicate a vision problem, including

- An eye turn, whether it is inward or outward
- Excessive rubbing of eyes or squinting
- Holding items too close
- Difficulties seeing the front of the classroom
- Difficulties concentrating on schoolwork
- Headaches, especially around the forehead region
- Seeing double vision or needing to close an eye to see clearly
- Skipping words while reading or notices words "swim" while reading
- Avoiding up close schoolwork such as reading
- Failing a vision screening test at school

vision, which is important for children when they are young and much of their learning involves color-coding.

An eye exam is performed by a Doctor of Optometry and covers all facets of eye health and can be done at any age.

"Children can be seen as early as infancy," Dr. Khieu says. "The critical period for visual development where the eyes and brain are developing visual connections ends around the age of seven, thus, initial eye exams prior to this age are crucial."

Dr. Khieu says it's especially important that children have their eyes checked prior to starting school. The AOA agrees and recommends a thorough eye exam between the ages of three and five.

Thanks to technology

and advanced diagnostic testing equipment, children do not need to know the alphabet or how to read in order to have his or her eyes examined.

Dr. Khieu explains that the first eye exam requires several baseline tests to ensure that the patient's vision, eye teaming skills, prescription and ocular health are within what is expected for the child's age.

"The child will undergo several engaging tests with the technicians and doctor," she says. "During their first visit, parents should expect dilation of the child's pupils to determine if glasses are required for the child and to fully assess the health of their eyes."

If glasses are needed, Dr. Khieu says there are plenty of kid-friendly options available. Her best advice is

and color, is something that may motivate the child to wear them," Dr. Khieu says.

"Also, focusing on positive factors, such as how it can help them improve in school and/or playing sports are great pointers to discuss with your child."

Lenses for children are all made with shatter-resistant material, which provides added protection for their safety.

For small children, wrap-around glasses are available, which can help keep the actual frames from falling off.

Dr. Khieu says she has found that once a child notices the improvement in their vision, they are often more motivated and excited to wear them.

"Parents should keep in mind that a child's eyes may change as they continue to grow and the prescription may change year after year," she says. "It is certainly helpful to invest in a great pair of glasses but know the prescription will likely change as they continue to develop."

to find something that your child likes.

"Having their input on what kind of frames they choose, such as the style



Dr. Tina Khieu

To learn more about what you can do to support your child's eye health, contact Dr. Tina Khieu and Chan Family Optometry.

Chan Family Optometry  
360 Sierra College Dr., Suite 100  
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### Support Groups Available Virtually

■ **Cancer Support Group**  
Open to anyone at any stage of their cancer journey, with any kind of cancer.  
Every Wednesday 3-4:30 p.m. via Zoom  
Linda Meyers, LCSW, 530.478.1273

■ **Ovarian Cancer Support Group**  
3rd Tuesday each month:  
11 a.m. – 12:30 via Zoom  
For Information: Mary Peterson, LMFT, 530.478.1880

■ **Prostate Cancer Support Group**  
4th Thursday each month:  
4:30 – 6 p.m. via Zoom  
Mary Peterson, LMFT, 530.478.1880

■ **SNMH Community Cancer Center G.A.T.E. Grief Support Group**  
Grief support for those who have lost someone close due to cancer.  
Tuesdays: 3:30 – 5p.m. via Zoom- Jeanine Bryant, MS, 530.274.6654

■ **SNMH Harp Therapy Support Group**  
Enjoy the healing power of music and friendship! For anyone affected by cancer including patients, family caregiver or those with a cancer history. Each group member receives a small Celtic harp to play at home and share together with others in the class. No musical experience is necessary.  
Fridays: 3 p.m. via Zoom  
For more information: Lisa Stine 530-632-6226 or email lisastineharp@gmail.com

■ **Transformational Wholeness: Integrating Body, Mind, and Spirit**  
For woman with cancer or a caregiver.  
Every Tuesday 10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. via Zoom.  
Dr. Nanci Shanderá: drnanci@earthspiritcenter.com

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## More Doctors Use Telehealth

If the idea of getting advice from your doctor without leaving the comfort of your home sounds appealing, a telehealth appointment may be for you – and you'd be in good company: The vast majority of doctors say they are now using telehealth (or "virtual care") options to see patients regularly.

Types of virtual care offered by doctors ranges from phone calls to Zoom meetings to other videoconferencing-type platforms. The idea is all the same, though – providing care to patients that includes conversation and (in most cases) face to face contact, without the risk of seeing each other in-person.

According to the American Medical Association, only one-quarter of doctors used telehealth three years ago. That number jumped to 80% in 2020.

The data contained in the AMA's latest Physician Practice Benchmark Survey is consistent with dozens of similar studies and surveys, all showing that the use of virtual care skyrocketed last year amid concerns over COVID-19.

Both patients and physicians find the virtual care options to offer increased convenience, as well.

Broken down into physician types, psychiatrists were most likely to use telehealth (85%), while 76% of primary care specialties – pediatricians, family/general practice physicians and general internists – used it.

The data from the AMA reflects usage rates at the peak of the pandemic. Most doctors are now reporting declining rates of telehealth appointments. However, most believe that they will continue to offer it as an option, particularly as COVID-19 numbers continue to remain high.

Doctors do point out that not every visit can be done via telehealth. The types of visits best suited for telehealth include follow up visits; medication management; chronic disease management; discussion of test results; and for initial treatment of flu, cold, allergy and COVID-19 symptoms.

Many specialists – including dermatologists, allergists, gastroenterologists, neurologists and endocrinologists – offer telehealth visits, particularly for follow-up or disease management appointments.

To find out if telehealth might be appropriate for your next visit, talk to your doctor.

- SNMH