**Ophthalmologists Warn of Five Frightening Risks of Wearing Contact Lenses Without a Prescription**

Zombie or devil contact lenses may elevate a Halloween costume’s fright factor, but wearing them without a prescription could result in something far more terrifying – blindness. The [INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME] joins the [American Academy of Ophthalmology](http://www.aao.org) in urging Halloween shoppers to understand the risks of wearing over-the-counter contact lenses.

While it is illegal to sell non-prescription contact lenses, they can still be easily purchased at many places such as beauty supply stores, costume shops and on the web. Falsely advertised as “one-size-fits-all” or “no prescription necessary,” these lenses can cause serious eye damage. Last year, [one girl became partially blind in her left eye](http://www.wxyz.com/news/region/macomb-county/local-teen-left-partially-blind-after-buying-costume-contacts-at-gibraltar-trade-center), the top layer of her cornea having been ripped off, after a mere four hours of wearing non-prescription contact lenses she bought at a jewelry booth.

Ophthalmologists – the physicians and surgeons that specialize in medical and surgical eye care – are reminding people of five frightening consequences of ignoring the warnings:

1. **Scratches to the eye** – If contacts are not professionally fitted to your eye, they can scratch the clear front window of the eye. This is called a [corneal abrasion](http://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/what-is-corneal-abrasion), which is not only painful, but can cause permanent damage. Just ask [Laura Butler](http://www.aao.org/eye-health/news/scary-lenses), who was in severe pain due to corneal abrasions 10 hours after putting in non-prescription lenses, which “stuck to my eye like suction cups.” Treatment often involves medication and patching, but in some cases damage cannot be reversed. Butler now lives with a corneal scar, vision damage and a drooping eyelid.
2. **Infection** – Research shows wearing non-prescription contacts increases the risk of an infection called [keratitis](http://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/what-is-bacterial-keratitis) by 16 times.[[1]](#endnote-1) Early treatment with antibiotic or steroid drops may preserve vision, but sometimes surgery, such as [corneal transplantation](http://www.aao.org/eye-health/treatments/about-corneal-transplantation), is necessary. [Robyn Rouse](http://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/costume-contacts-real-life-nightmare) had to have that surgery after she got an infection after wearing non-prescription lenses she bought at a local store. Twelve years later, she still has blurry vision in her left eye and uses daily drops to combat dry eye.
3. **Pink eye** – Never share contacts because doing so can spread germs, causing conditions such as [pink eye](http://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/pink-eye-conjunctivitis). Highly contagious, pink eye treatment depends on the cause, but typically includes antibiotic drops.
4. **Decreased vision** – Whether from a corneal scratch or infection, wearing non-prescription contacts can lead to decreased vision.
5. **Blindness** – It’s no scare tactic: wearing non-prescription contacts can lead to permanent vision loss. [Julian Hamlin](http://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/julian-hamlin-costume-contacts-blinded) has had more than 10 surgeries and is now legally blind in his left eye after wearing contacts to change his eye color, a mistake he’ll live with forever.

The Academy encourages the public to watch and share its [“No Prescription, No Way” public service announcement](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZHXHueJifU) that shows the serious damage that these non-prescription costume contact lenses can inflict on the eyes.

Visit the [Academy’s EyeSmart® website](http://www.aao.org/) to learn more about contact lens safety.

1. Sauer, A., & Bourcier, T. 2011. Microbial keratitis as a foreseeable complication of cosmetic contact lenses: A prospective study. Acta Ophthalmologica 89 5, pp. e439-e422. DOI:10.1111/j.1755-3768.2011.02120.x [↑](#endnote-ref-1)