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**Children Going Blind Story on CNN Shows Importance of Annual Eye Exams for Kids
*Canadian Family Traveling World Before Children Go Blind Due to Retinitis Pigmentosa***

Atlanta, Ga. (September 23, 2022) – The poignant story of a Canadian family traveling the world to show their children the sights before they go blind due to retinitis pigmentosa should serve as a reminder to parents that all children need annual comprehensive eye exams, say leaders of the Georgia Optometric Association. For more than a century, the GOA has represented doctors of optometry in Georgia and provided the public with information about eye health and vision care.

According to CNN, Edith Lemay and Sebastien Pelletier of Canada decided to travel and give their children “visual memories” after three of their four kids were diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, a rare genetic condition that causes a loss or decline in vision over time. The children were each diagnosed after visits with specialists and the parents were proactive in getting their children the care they needed. <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/canadian-family-retinitis-pigmentosa/index.html?fbclid=IwAR1BxNk1PkpYsJQe7WBUC0TfbR5yN3LtAz5cscVDGmLFMONFWPpUJFo9R1g>

According to the National Eye Institute, part of the US National Institutes of Health, an agency of the US Department of Health and Human Services, retinitis pigmentosa symptoms usually begin in childhood, and most people eventually lose most of their sight.

“Good vision and overall eye health are essential in childhood development,” said Dr. John E. Titak, president of the Georgia Optometric Association. “The story of the Lemay-Pelletier family really underscores what Georgia’s doctors of optometry have been saying about the need for annual comprehensive eye exams for children. Hopefully, not every child receives such a health diagnosis, but spotting trouble signs early is the best way to treat and prevent vision loss.”

Through a comprehensive eye exam, doctors of optometry can identify early warning signs and manifestations of more than 270 systemic and chronic diseases including diabetes, high blood pressure, autoimmune diseases and cancers.

According to the American Optometric Association’s Evidence-Based Clinical Practice Guideline: Comprehensive Pediatric Eye and Vision Examination:

- Preschool-age children should receive at least one in-person comprehensive eye and vision examination between the ages of 3 and 5 to prevent and/or diagnose and treat any eye or vision conditions that may affect visual development. One in five preschoolers has a vision problem.
- School-age children should now receive an in-person comprehensive eye and vision examination **annually** to diagnose, treat and manage any eye or vision problems. Previous recommendations were for eye exams to occur once every two years.
- Routine vision screenings offered at a school or pediatrician’s office are not enough. In their initial stages, many vision and eye health conditions lack obvious signs or symptoms. Routine vision screenings cannot be relied on to catch most vision problems. Even if problems are detected, 61 percent of those children with a problem will not receive appropriate follow-up. Evidence demonstrates that the best course of action is following an annual eye exam schedule.

- Children who experience a concussion should visit their optometrist for a comprehensive eye exam in addition to an appointment with their health care provider. Studies have shown that there is a high prevalence of vision problems in children who experience a concussion, so comprehensive eye exams are essential in protecting their vision as well as determining if more care is needed.
- Ocular trauma such as corneal scars, hemorrhages and folds are often linked to child abuse and neglect. Comprehensive eye exams play an important role in identifying signs of abuse when external signs may be limited or nonexistent.
- Some additional updates to the guideline include information on myopia, eye injury/protection, the benefit outdoor exposure has on vision and the importance of ultraviolet radiation and blue light protection.

Learn more about eye exams by <https://www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/eye-health-for-life>.

To find an optometrist in your area use the ZIP code locator at www.GOAeyes.com.

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The Georgia Optometric Association is a statewide professional organization representing over 700 doctors of optometry located in communities throughout the state of Georgia. Founded in 1904, the GOA and its members work to provide the public with quality vision and eye care services. For more information visit www.GOAeyes.com, or follow www.facebook.com/GeorgiaOptometricAssociation, www.twitter.com/GOA_eyes and www.instagram.com/GOAeyes.