

Heading back-to-school during COVID-19

The global pandemic ended the 2020 school year in extraordinary ways — shuttering physical schools, pushing students to home learning models for the final quarter of the year and squashing extra-curricular activities.

Summer looks different, too, with some pools and camps closed, amusement parks limiting attendance and some fall sports in question.

So, if the end-of school was an alternate reality, the question now is, what does back-to-school look like? And whether at home or in the classroom, how can you make sure your child is seeing clearly?

Screen learning still in-scope

Although the picture might look different by state, chances are there will still be continued reliance on increased screen learning. While resourceful, it's a watch out since computer vision syndrome (also called digital eye strain) is a real thing.¹ It's caused by visual stress from too much screen time. Symptoms may include tired eyes, dry eyes, headache and fatigue, as well as posture-related neck, back and shoulder discomfort.²

But there are ways to help keep kids' vision strong while being exposed to more computer work:

- Like adults, kids should follow the 20/20/20 rule: Look up from your computer every 20 minutes at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds. 20-20-20. Simple, right? You could even tape this [tracking sheet](#) to the side of the monitor and when they're all filled up, the kids can pick a prize.
- Adjust the brightness and contrast of the screen for comfort.³
- Remind kids to blink when watching a screen.
- Play off-screen vision strengthening games, [like these from Pearle Vision®](#).
- Schedule media-free time, outside if possible. The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) suggests outdoor time can slow the progression of nearsightedness, especially in early childhood.⁴

Signs to watch for

With potentially less classroom instruction time, it's even more crucial for parents to observe a child's vision within a learning context, especially when you consider that 80% of early learning comes through the eyes.⁵ Typically, teachers are your best allies here, but if kids are in school less, more of the onus falls on you.

Here are a few signs that may indicate it's time for an eye exam:

- Squinting
- Head tilting
- Rubbing eyes or covering 1 eye
- Headache or tired eyes
- Reading with a finger
- Change in grades

For more about what a child's behavior may be telling you about how they see, check out this fun [Beyond the Behavior interactive tool](#).

Evolving eye exams

When you're ready to visit the eye doctor, you may notice some changes. These might include social distancing requirements, staff wearing more personal protective equipment (PPE) and more space in between appointments. To reduce anxiety, you'll want to give your child a heads up before heading in.

Be sure to check with your provider to verify hours and any new pre-visit instructions they may have due to the pandemic.

Need an eye doctor? Find one on eyemed.com.

This article is an advertisement.

1. "Children and technology: Protecting your child's eyes,"; by Gary Heiting OD; <https://www.allaboutvision.com/parents/children-computer-vision-syndrome.htm>; accessed April 2020.

2. "Children and technology: Protecting your child's eyes,"; by Gary Heiting OD; <https://www.allaboutvision.com/parents/children-computer-vision-syndrome.htm>; accessed April 2020.

3. "Screen use for kids"; American Academy of Ophthalmology; <https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/screen-use-kids>; accessed April 2020.

4. Ibid

5. “Are learning-related vision issues holding your child back,” by Rob Murphy with updates and review by Gary Heiting, OD,;
<https://www.allaboutvision.com/parents/learning.htm>; accessed April 2020.

Source: The Discovery Eye Foundation, Learning-related vision problems, July 2014.

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