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Vision Impairment and Preventable Blindness Affects Everyone – Enhance Sight to Enhance Lives on World Sight Day, October 10; Ensure Healthy Vision within Your Families and Home

- Preventing blindness and vision impairment starts at home – take care of your vision and help others do the same
- 80% of vision problems can be prevented, treated or cured, provided people have access to eye care¹
- Up to 12 million children in the US, ages 5-15 are affected by vision impairment, which interferes with learning, education and social development²

Fort Worth, Texas – October 7, 2013 – We experience almost everything in life through our eyes, and being without it can have far-reaching implications that impact all areas of a person’s life and the lives of their family. This World Sight Day, Alcon encourages individuals and families to understand the importance of eye health and maintaining healthy vision, as well as the need for accessible eye care for everyone. Taking on the issue of global blindness and vision impairment is a large task, but Alcon believes everyone can help – starting with their own families and communities.

Many people believe that preventable blindness and vision impairment only affect individuals who live within impoverished communities and developing nations, but that’s not always the case. It’s true that up to 90% of the world’s visually impaired live in developing countries.³ However, **blindness and visual disability have become major public health issues around the world, affecting people of all ages, and in all communities, even in the most developed of nations.** More than 800 million people globally live with vision problems, and more than 80% of those conditions can be prevented, treated or cured – provided people have access to eye care.^{1,4}

Children and the Impact of Poor Vision – Eye-alarming US Statistics

Children rarely complain about vision problems, or are even aware they exist, as they believe that everyone sees the world like they do. All parents want their children to do well in school, but too often, one important learning tool is overlooked – a child’s vision.

When children are between the ages of 1 and 12, **80% of their learning occurs through the eyes.**⁵ But, when a child has a vision problem, hand-eye coordination, social development, and even the simple tasks we may take for granted, such as reading, writing and using computers, can be impacted. When vision is not functioning properly, education and learning can suffer.



Enhancing **Sight.**
Enhancing **Lives.**

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More than **12 million children in the US, ages 5 to 15, are visually impaired due to uncorrected refractive errors** as a result of near-sightedness, far-sightedness or astigmatism – conditions, which, with a simple eye exam, can be treated with glasses or contact lenses.² Within the US, **25% of all school children have a vision problem significant enough to affect learning**, and many parents aren't aware that behavior problems can actually be an indication that a child's vision is impaired.⁵ The social and economic impact from this is so vast, third and fourth grade reading levels and literacy scores of students are used by some US prison systems to predict the number of beds needed for the next 10 years.^{6,7}

"Everyone knows a person affected by visual impairment, whether the condition is caused by far-sightedness, near-sightedness, or even cataracts," said Matthew Head, Director of Corporate Giving for Alcon. "Unfortunately, eye health is often not a priority for many people, and in some communities, eye care services aren't even available or accessible at all," said Matthew Head, Director of Corporate Giving for Alcon. "Blindness and vision impairment affect people of all ages. Making sure to get your eyes examined on a regular basis and maintaining healthy vision are an important part of a person's overall health – whether that individual is young or old. The Alcon Foundation is dedicated to increasing access to eye care where it is most needed, and partners with many non-profit organizations in emerging markets and local communities to enhance sight to enhance lives."

What Can You Do?

First, take care of your vision and help your family do the same. You maintain your home and car, so you should also maintain your vision and eyes to help protect your overall health.

Be sure to make vision care and eye exams also a part of your child's routine medical care. Even newborns and infants should be routinely screened during checkups with their pediatrician or family doctor. As children get older, if they begin showing any of the following signs of vision problems, take them to an eye doctor immediately for an exam:⁵

- Poor concentration and comprehension; or a short attention span
- Complaints about seeing double or blurry vision
- Losing his or her place while reading
- Avoiding reading and other close activities
- Frequent headaches
- Covering one eye or tilting the head to one side
- Holding reading materials close to the face



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Get Involved this World Sight Day

To help on World Sight Day, you can transform the lives of many through the gift of sight. Help eliminate barriers and reduce the incidence of preventable blindness and visual impairment by donating to an eye health organization in your community, or to one of the sight-saving organizations Alcon is supporting for World Sight Day – [Kids Vision for Life](#), [Mercy Ships](#), [Optometry Giving Sight](#), [ORBIS International](#), [Surgical Eye Expeditions International, Inc.](#), or [VisionSpring](#).

About World Sight Day

World Sight Day is a global initiative coordinated by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness through the VISION 2020 Global Initiative. Together, they aim to eliminate the main causes of preventable blindness by the year 2020 with the help of professional associations, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), eye care institutions and corporations.

About Alcon

Alcon, the global leader in eye care, provides innovative products that enhance quality of life by helping people worldwide see better. The three Alcon businesses – Surgical, Pharmaceutical and Vision Care – offer one of the widest portfolios of eye care products in the world. Alcon is the second largest division of the Novartis Group with pro-forma sales of USD 10.2 billion in 2012. Headquartered in Fort Worth, Texas, USA, Alcon has more than 24,000 employees worldwide, operations in 75 countries and products available in 180 markets. For more information, visit www.alcon.com.

To learn more about Alcon's Corporate Giving efforts, visit <http://www.alcon.com/corporate-responsibility>.

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¹ International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), Global Facts, <http://www.iapb.org/vision-2020/global-facts>

² Lighthouse International. Prevalence of Vision Impairment. <http://www.lighthouse.org/research/statistics-on-vision-impairment/prevalence-of-vision-impairment/>

³ World Health Organization. Visual Impairment and Blindness. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en/>

⁴ Brien Holden Vision Institute, Vision Correction Needs, <http://www.brienholdenvision.org/research/vision-correction-needs.html>

⁵ School-aged Vision: 6 to 18 Years of Age <http://www.aoa.org/patients-and-public/good-vision-throughout-life/childrens-vision/school-aged-vision-6-to-18-years-of-age>

⁶ Kids at Risk Action – Children's Rights Advocacy Network. Invisible Children. <http://www.invisiblechildren.org/taq/failed-third-grade-reading-scores/>

⁷ Kids Vision for Life. Eye Opening Facts. <http://www.kidsvisionforlife.org/eye-opening-facts/eye-opening-facts/>