



PEDIATRIC OPTOMETRY

Early detection and treatment of vision problems are crucial for a child's development and overall well-being. The American Optometric Association recommends comprehensive eye exams for children at 6 months, 3 years, and at the start of school, with annual exams thereafter, or more frequently if needed.

Vision conditions are common in children. Approximately 10% of preschoolers have a vision condition, while one in four school-age children need eyeglasses to see the blackboard or to read a book. Fortunately, most common vision conditions can be treated effectively with appropriate care and follow-up.

In preschool and school-age children, untreated vision problems can impact success at school, reading ability, connecting with friends and performance in sports. In infants and toddlers, vision is crucial for social, motor,

language development, as children learn to respond to their mother or father's smile, move towards toys and mimic facial expressions. Vision conditions such as amblyopia, if not treated before school-age, can even lead to permanent vision loss. This means that early detection, diagnosis, treatment and follow-up of a child's vision condition are critical.

Pediatric optometrists specialize in children's vision and eye health and have additional training, education, and experience working with kids. They provide specialized

care for children with unique eye health needs, including vision care for special health care needs children such as those with Down syndrome or on the autism spectrum, nonverbal children, premature infants, and children with low vision or cortical blindness, a condition where the brain's ability to process visual information is impaired, leading to vision loss despite normal eye function.

Similar to general optometrists, pediatric optometrists perform thorough eye examinations, provide prescriptions for corrective lenses (eyeglasses and contact lenses), and diagnose and treat various eye problems and vision conditions. They are trained to recognize subtle signs of eye problems in infants and young children that may go unnoticed by parents and employ specialized techniques and tools to assess a child's vision development and detect any potential issues.



Providing pediatric care necessitates a high level of patience, creativity, and the skill to establish a connection with young patients, who may not always be capable of expressing their symptoms. It is important for pediatric care providers to have the ability to recognize and interpret non-verbal cues and signs in children who may have difficulty communicating their discomfort. Pediatric care providers need to have the capacity to adapt their communication style to suit the developmental stage and individual needs of each child.

Training

Once you have obtained your optometry degree, pursuing a one-year residency in pediatric optometry can be highly effective for gaining specialized, hands-on experience. These residency programs offer advanced competency post-doctoral clinical and classroom training in Pediatric Optometry. Pediatric Optometry residency programs may provide clinical training in areas such as comprehensive pediatric eye care managing common childhood vision conditions, pediatric contact lenses, myopia control, providing care to children with special health care needs, and vision therapy. The residents may provide care in clinics affiliated with the schools and colleges of Optometry, community settings,

Resources

- **American Academy of Optometry (AAO)**
<https://aaopt.org/>

The AAO offers a broad range of educational resources, including a dedicated section for pediatric and binocular vision.

- **American Optometric Association (AOA)**
<https://www.aoa.org/>

The AOA supports optometrists with advocacy, professional development and educational tools tailored to a wide range of specialties, including pediatric optometry. There are a number of tools available to ODs, such as the AOA Vision Therapy Task Force, which promotes awareness and understanding of this specialty for not only AOA members but also the general public and other professionals.



private practices or hospital-based settings. In these settings pediatric optometry residents may provide care and learn alongside pediatric ophthalmology fellows, fostering a strong working relationship.

Furthermore, participating in a pediatric residency program provides valuable exposure to working with diverse pediatric populations, enabling optometrists to develop the essential skills needed to address the unique challenges of treating young patients. Pediatric Optometrists often collaborate with other professionals who advocate for children such as medical, school health and educational professions, as well as occupational, physical and speech therapists.

Why choose this path?

As a pediatric optometrist, I truly feel like I get to be part of something special. I have the opportunity to provide eye care for kids at the Charles River Community Health Center in Brighton, MA. What I love most about working here is the collaborative environment—optometry, medicine, dentistry, and behavioral health all work together to care for our pediatric patients. This team-based approach allows us to deliver the best, most holistic care possible to kids, especially those who are at higher risk. My main goal is to remove any visual barriers that might hold them back from learning, helping them thrive academically and live healthier lives.

In addition to patient care, I also have the privilege of mentoring future optometrists, both in the clinic and in the classroom. It's incredibly rewarding to guide the next generation of professionals. I also conduct pediatric research and advocate for children through my work with public health organizations.

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