



# Harris County Hospital District

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Skin Isn't the Only Thing You Should Protect from the Sun**

HOUSTON (June 22, 2007) – As you slather on sunscreen to protect your skin this summer, don't forget to protect your eyes – extended time in the sun could lead to future eye problems.

“The ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun have detrimental effects on the eye,” said Dr. Reza Farahani, optometrist at Acres Home Health Center and instructor of ophthalmology at The University of Texas Medical School at Houston. “Everyone is at risk for eye damage from the sun year-round.”

Long-term exposure to UV rays can lead to cataracts, macular degeneration, eye sunburn, or even skin cancer around the eyelids.

Cataracts, clouding of the normally clear lens of your eye, can be caused from direct, strong UV rays hitting the eyes over the years.

Macular degeneration, a chronic eye disease which can cause blurred central vision or a blind spot, is one of the major diseases Farahani sees in the elderly. He attributes this to their exposure to the sun throughout the years.

Sun exposure can also lead to photokeratitis – sunburn of the cornea, which is quite painful, but reversible. Corneal burns can occur in skiers and even those who visit the beach. Bright landscape like snow and sand can reflect up to 80 percent of UV radiation.

The easiest way to protect your eyes is to reduce exposure to light by wearing sunglasses or regular glasses that have UV protection. “Make sure they are good-quality lenses,” Farahani said. “They should provide UV protection from both UVA and UVB rays.” Acceptable sunglasses should be labeled, “99 to 100 percent UV protection.”

Another way to protect your eyes is a multivitamin with antioxidants. “We know the UV factor causes an oxidation effect,” Farahani said. “But patients, especially those who are at a risk for macular degeneration, can help themselves by taking vitamins with antioxidants.”

The Harris County Hospital District is the public health care system for the nation's third most populous county. It provides more than 1.1 million health care visits each year to uninsured and underinsured residents of Harris County. The district operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, 12 community health centers, a dental center, eight school-based clinics, 13 homeless shelter clinics and four mobile health units.

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