Why Water and Contact Lenses Don’t Mix

*Water often contains bacteria that can cause eye infections; [State affiliate here] recommends good hygiene practices for contact lens wearers*

**LOCATION (DATE)**—Looking to escape the summer heat, Americans will flock to local pools, waterparks, or larger bodies of water for a day of relaxing relief or to play water sports. However, contact lens wearers sometimes break important sanitation rules and risk infection by wearing their contact lenses around water, which often contains bacteria. In fact, according to the American Optometric Association’s (AOA) 2015 American Eye-Q® Survey, nearly a quarter of those surveyed admit to swimming in their contact lenses. The [state affiliate here] offers contact lens wearers safety tips on how to keep their eyes healthy.

Contact lenses ‘are like sponges’

According to the FDA and the AOA, contact lenses should not be exposed to any kind of water, including tap water and water in showers—53 percent of contact lens wearers say they shower while wearing their lenses, according to the American Eye-Q.

“Contact lenses are like sponges and will absorb whatever is in the water, including any chemicals or bacteria that may be present,” said [Dr. Name.] “A rare but sight-threatening germ, *Acanthamoeba*, can be found in freshwater lakes, rivers and unclean tap water or well water and can cause a painful eye infection called *Acanthamoeba keratitis*. In the most severe cases, it can require a corneal transplant or even result in blindness.”

If a contact lens is accidentally splashed with water, use artificial tears to lubricate and float the lens on the eye, wash and dry your hands and remove the lens, then clean and disinfect the lens with fresh sterile solution, or if it is a disposable lens throw it away. If more pain or redness is observed in the eyes than normal after being in the pool, call an optometrist as soon as possible.

**UV protection especially important around water**

The [state affiliate here] stresses that the importance of UV protection applies to everyone, especially when around water. Sand and water at the beach, for instance, can reflect an additional 25 percent of UV rays, increasing the risk of damage to one’s eyes.

“Even just a few hours of intense exposure to sunlight out by the pool or beach could cause photokeratitis, known as a ‘sunburn of the eye,’ which can cause red eyes, a foreign-body sensation or gritty feeling in the eyes, extreme sensitivity to light and excessive tearing,” said [Dr. Name].

For optimal eye-sun safety, the AOA recommends wearing sunglasses that block out 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B rays. Click here to review the AOA's guide for choosing sunglasses.

**Eye safety and water sports**

An optometrist can recommend the best options for those who need vision correction while enjoying the water. For swimming, water skiing or other sports, well-fitted prescription goggles that offer vision correction may be an option. Another route may be a durable, expertly fitted pair of prescription sun eyewear, which not only provides vision correction but also protects against harmful UV rays. Once out of the water, individuals need to be sure their hands are clean before inserting new contact lenses.
If a patient doesn’t want to wear prescription goggles or prescription sun eyewear, his or her optometrist may prescribe daily disposable contact lenses, which offer optimum sanitation since they are made to be thrown out every day.

“Patients will still need to be very careful not to get tap or swim water in their eyes while wearing contacts and goggles are recommended for best protection, but disposable lenses make it easy to replace any contaminated lens with a fresh new one,” said [Dr. Name.]

Should an ocular emergency occur, your optometrist can help prevent an eye infection or other serious damage from occurring. The eye doctor can answer questions over the telephone and recommend an office or emergency room visit for care. Click here to review the AOA Sports Vision Section ocular emergency triage card.

Whether aiming to champion the tallest water slide or set a new goal on water skis, remember to practice good hygiene and safety with contact lenses and visit your optometrist annually, or more often if directed, to ensure your eyes are healthy. For additional resources about contact lens hygiene and safety, visit contactlenssafety.org or aoa.org. To find a doctor of optometry near you, visit [state association website].

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**About the American Eye-Q® survey:**
The 10th annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From February 19-March 4, 2015, PSB conducted 1,000 online interviews among Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of the U.S. general population. (Margin of error is plus or minus 3.10 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.)

**About the American Optometric Association (AOA):**
The American Optometric Association, a federation of state, student and armed forces optometric associations, was founded in 1898. Today, the AOA is proud to represent the profession of optometry, America’s family eye doctors, who take a leading role in an individual’s overall eye and vision care, health and well-being. Doctors of optometry (ODs) are the independent primary health care professionals for the eye and have extensive, ongoing training to examine, diagnose, treat and manage disorders, diseases and injuries that affect the eye and visual system, providing two-thirds of primary eye care in the U.S. For information on a variety of eye health and vision topics, and to find an optometrist near you, visit aoa.org.