

Young children with myopia at higher risk of poor vision, blindness: Study

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SINGAPORE: Children who develop myopia at early preschool or primary school are at a higher risk of having high myopia in adulthood, which can lead to poor vision or blindness.

This is according to a 5-year study from the Singapore Eye Research Institute and National University of Singapore on high myopia in Singapore children, which was released on Thursday (Oct 6).

The study also showed about 70 per cent of Singaporean teenagers between the ages of 11 and 18 are myopic. Of this, 13 per cent have high myopia. Researchers from the study estimate that by 2050, five million Singaporeans will be myopic, of which 15 per cent will get high myopia.

High myopia is defined as having an optical prescription of above 500 degrees and is associated with serious eye conditions such as retinal detachment cataract and glaucoma later in life.

"Myopia is a disease that spans a lifetime, from early childhood to our senior years," said Professor Saw Seang Mei, principal investigator of the study.

"The key to myopia prevention is to delay or prevent very early onset myopia in children, to reduce the chances of high myopia and associated blinding complications when the child grows into adulthood."

Researchers say spending more time outdoors can delay the onset of myopia. This is because strong sunlight releases a chemical in the eye which can stop the disease from progressing. Young children can also use atropine eye drops to decrease the rate of progression, they said.

Myopia typically develops when a child is eight years old and progresses over the next 10 to 15 years. It is associated with genetic, environmental and lifestyle factors, the researchers added.

Editor's note: An earlier version of this article said the study spanned 15 years. The time span has been amended following clarification from SERI.

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