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More risks for kids with myopia: study

Children who develop myopia at pre-school or primary school have a higher risk of high myopia in adulthood, which can lead to poor vision or blindness, according to a study on high myopia in Singapore children released yesterday.

Professor Saw Seang Mei, principal investigator of the joint study by the Singapore Eye Research Institute and National University of Singapore, said: "Approximately 69 per cent of Singapore teenagers aged 11 to 18 years are myopic and 13 per cent have high myopia.

"The dual impact of impending ageing of the young population with extremely high rates of myopia and the ageing of our society will lead to a new epidemic of potentially age-related blinding myopia in the next few decades in Singapore."

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.

As part of the study, 1,979 pupils, aged seven to nine, from three schools, were invited to take part in 1999.

Through repeated eye examinations, researchers determined the age of onset of myopia. The number of books read per week, time spent outdoors, height, and parents with myopia were also characteristics that were evaluated.

"Myopia is a disease that spans a lifetime, from early childhood to our senior years," said Prof Saw.

Preventive efforts such as spending time more outdoors should be implemented in pre-school or primary school children, said the report.

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