



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **New AOA Report Reveals High Number of Infants with Untreated Eye and Vision Problems**

*Data shows one-in-six affected overall; higher rates among minority and underprivileged*

ST. LOUIS, March 30, 2010 — A new report released by the American Optometric Association (AOA) identifies surprising new insights into the vision and eye health of infants across the U.S. The findings from last year's InfantSEE® Weeks pilot program, a year-long, federally-funded public health initiative, revealed a higher-than-expected number of infants with undiagnosed and untreated vision and eye health problems.

During the 2009 InfantSEE® Weeks, more than 1,000 comprehensive eye and vision assessments were conducted in eight states. Data from the assessments showed that one-in-six infants exhibited an overall cause for concern requiring follow-up care from an eye care professional.

The data also revealed one-in-four premature or minority infants displayed higher rates of cause for concern than other infants assessed during the pilot project. Additionally, one-in-four infants had a cause for concern in households with annual incomes below \$25,000, and one-in-three infants had a cause for concern in households with incomes less than \$15,000.

InfantSEE® provides a one-time, comprehensive eye assessment to infants in their first year of life, typically between the ages of six and 12 months. These assessments are provided at no cost to all families, regardless of ability to pay or access to insurance coverage.

Because healthy eyes and vision are critical to normal development in infants and children, the AOA established the nationwide InfantSEE® program in 2005 to provide comprehensive eye and vision assessments to babies. Participating doctors of optometry, who assessed infants' vision during the program's first four years, observed rates of cause for concern to be between one-in-fourteen and one-in-nine.

Those troubling rates highlighted the need for federal funding to educate more parents and caregivers and increase access to infant eye assessments. Federal recognition and funding was secured in 2008 with the support of Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) and the InfantSEE® Weeks pilot program was launched in January of 2009.

“During the past five years, the InfantSEE® program has provided considerable insight into the overall visual health of infants in this country,” said AOA president Dr. Randolph E. Brooks. “If not properly diagnosed and treated early, a number of eye and vision conditions can impair an infant's ability to reach important developmental milestones, create lifelong learning and social problems and threaten sight.”

Many eye and vision conditions diagnosed during the 2009 InfantSEE® Weeks were those for which early treatment is both very effective and critical for normal development, including farsightedness, nearsightedness, amblyopia (lazy eye) and strabismus (crossed eyes). In addition, two infants assessed were diagnosed with retinoblastoma - the seventh most common pediatric cancer.

“We feel fortunate to have identified two cases of retinoblastoma through this important and no-cost public health program,” said Dr. Brooks. “Usually, retinoblastoma eye cancers are discovered in one in 20,000 children. Finding two cases among more than 1,000 infants is alarming and demonstrates the necessity of comprehensive eye assessments for all infants.”

InfantSEE® assessments complement a pediatrician’s routine well-care visit. However, comprehensive eye and vision assessments like those given through InfantSEE® are more thorough than typical childhood vision screenings, utilizing specialized instruments and procedures, which are not available to routine early childhood vision screening programs.

The AOA recommends that infants have an InfantSEE® assessment before their first birthday and young children have comprehensive eye exams at age three, before starting school and then every two years thereafter.

The 2009 InfantSEE® Weeks pilot program included comprehensive eye and vision assessments in Madison, Wis.; Chicago; Seattle; St. Louis and communities throughout the states of Iowa, Louisiana, North Dakota and West Virginia.

Through the continued support of Sen. Byrd and new federal backing from U.S. Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), the AOA is now making preparations for the launch of the 2010 InfantSEE® tour. Parents can find more information and locate an InfantSEE® provider in their area by visiting [www.infantsee.org](http://www.infantsee.org) or by calling toll-free 888-396-EYES (3937).

To access the full InfantSEE® Weeks report, please [click here](#).

### ***About InfantSEE®***

InfantSEE® is a public health program managed by Optometry’s Charity™ — The AOA Foundation. Designed to ensure that eye and vision care become an integral part of infant wellness and improve a child’s quality of life, doctors of optometry provide one-time, no-cost eye and vision assessment to infants between the ages of 6 and 12 months regardless of family income or access to insurance coverage. For more information, visit [www.infantsee.org](http://www.infantsee.org).

### ***About the American Optometric Association***

American Optometric Association (AOA) doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors, on the frontline of eye health and vision care, who examine, diagnose, treat, and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in an individual’s overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases. Doctors of optometry have the skills and training to provide more than two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States. The AOA represents more than 36,000 doctors of optometry,

optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians in nearly 6,500 communities across the country. For more information, visit [www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org).

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