



Non-Corrective Cosmetic Contact Lenses

Background

Non-corrective cosmetic contact lenses (also known as decorative, coloured, or fashion contact lenses) are used to change the colour or appearance of the eyes. Like contact lenses used for vision correction, cosmetic contact lenses can pose a risk of harm if improperly fit, used, or cared for. Complications such as corneal abrasions, allergic and toxic reactions, conjunctivitis, discomfort, dryness, and potentially serious corneal infiltrations or infections, such as microbial keratitis, can occur.¹ Some of these complications can pose a threat to one's vision.

Complications from the use of contact lenses, including cosmetic contact lenses, are common. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that one in three contact lens wearers have experienced a contact-lens-related complication that required a visit to the doctor². Additionally, 99% of contact lens wearers report at least one behaviour that can increase their risk for eye infections.² Cosmetic contact lens wearers appear to be at a higher risk for infection compared to those who wear contact lenses to improve their vision.¹

1

Cosmetic contact lenses sold in Canada are regulated as Class II medical devices³. Manufacturers of non-corrective contact lenses must obtain a Class II medical device license to sell the products in Canada³. Also, importers and distributors of the products are required to obtain a medical device establishment license³. Cosmetic contact lenses must be labeled according to the *Medical Devices Regulations* (MDR)⁴. Although these requirements are in place, in 2018, Health Canada found that 35% of randomly selected retail outlets and 59% of internet retailers failed to comply with licensing and labeling requirements for cosmetic contact lenses⁴.

Policy Issue

The regulation of non-corrective cosmetic contact lenses as Class II medical devices is necessary for consumer protection and safety. However, the use of cosmetic contact lenses without a prescription and proper instruction and supervision increases the wearer's risk of complications, including the risk of vision loss.



Policy Position

The CAO commends Health Canada for recognizing the dangers posed by cosmetic contact lenses and ensuring regulated oversight of the manufacturing, distribution, and labeling of these products. These regulations will safeguard the vision of all Canadians.

Due to the risk of harm posed by non-corrective contact lenses, CAO maintains that their use should require a prescription from a regulated eye care professional. Prescriptions and proper instructions as to the use and care of cosmetic contact lenses help to minimize the public health risks posed by these devices.

If optometrists or consumers wish to report medical device-related complaints, including concerns about safety or counterfeit products, they can do so by completing Health Canada's online Health Product Complaint Form.

References

1. Lim, C. H., Stapleton, F., & Mehta, J. S. (2019). A review of cosmetic contact lens infections. *Eye*, 33(1), 78-86. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6328606/>
2. Cope, J. R., Collier, S. A., Rao, M. M., Chalmers, R., Mitchell, G. L., Richdale, K., ... & Beach, M. J. (2015). Contact lens wearer demographics and risk behaviors for contact lens-related eye infections—United States, 2014. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 64(32), 865-870. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5779588/>
3. Health Canada. (2016, June 10). *Notice: decorative contact lenses*. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/medical-devices/activities/announcements/notice-decorative-contact-lenses.html>
4. Health Canada. (2019). *2018-2019 compliance monitoring project (CMP) on decorative contact lenses*. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/inspecting-monitoring-drug-health-products/compliance-monitoring-reports/2018-2019-decorative-contact-lenses.html>