

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road, NE  
Atlanta, GA 30333

February 11th, 2022

Dear Dr. Walensky,

As Members of Congress concerned for the health of our nation's children, we write to express our concern with the rising prevalence of childhood myopia, a chronic progressive eye disease that requires immediate attention. We request that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provide an update on their efforts to encourage early detection and prevention of myopia.

Eye and vision problems in children are a significant global public health concern. Myopia, the most common eye health condition, is a chronic progressive disease that poses the biggest threat to global eye health this century. Children aged 12 and younger who become myopic have a high risk of becoming highly myopic with a commensurate increased risk of developing visually threatening complications later in life. Prevalence of myopia among young adults has skyrocketed in the past 20 years in both eastern and western societies,<sup>1</sup> with nearly 80% of young adults affected in Asian regions,<sup>2</sup> and 50% of young adults affected in the U.S. and parts of Europe.<sup>3</sup> The current COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified the prevalence of myopia, as many children are spending increased hours indoors doing near work activity as they engage in remote learning.

As you know, eye and vision problems can worsen over time and myopia, in particular, is a continuum of disease stages. Low and moderate levels of myopia were previously thought to be merely an optical disorder that inconvenienced those affected by requiring them to wear an optical correction (glasses or contact lenses) or to have refractive surgery. However, detrimental impacts of myopia have been observed in diverse aspects of daily living, including activity limitation, economic wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, physical impacts, and social wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> Higher levels of myopia have an even more dramatic impact on quality of life. Any degree of myopia increases risk of complications, including myopic macular

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<sup>1</sup> Holden BA et al. Global Prevalence of Myopia and High Myopia and Temporal Trends from 2000 through 2050. *Ophthalmology*. 2016;123:1036-42.

<sup>2</sup> Ding, Bo-Yuan, et al. Myopia among schoolchildren in East Asia and Singapore. *Surv Ophthalmol* 62;2017:677-697

<sup>3</sup> Vitale S et al. Prevalence of refractive error in the United States, 1999-2004. *Arch Ophthalmol*. 2008;126:1111-9; Williams K et al. Increasing prevalence of myopia in Europe and the impact of education. *Ophthalmology*. 2015;122:1489-97.

<sup>4</sup> Sankaridurg P et al. IMI Impact of Myopia. *Invest Ophthalmol Vis Sci*. 2021;62(5):2.

degeneration, retinal detachment, cataracts, and primary open-angle glaucoma, with the risk increasing exponentially with increasing levels of myopia.<sup>5</sup>

There is no existing cure for myopia. As such, prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment are crucial to mitigate many of the long-term effects highlighted above. Preventing future vision loss and ensuring lifetime eye health can be facilitated through equitable access to high quality, comprehensive eye care for all children. Comprehensive eye exams are important not only for refractive correction, or what it takes to bring vision acuity to 20/20, but for finding eye diseases and preserving vision.<sup>6</sup> The American Optometric Association (AOA) recommends that children receive a comprehensive eye exam at least once between the ages of 3-5 years old to establish baseline measurements and be provided continuing examinations at least annually until the age of 18 years old.<sup>7</sup> With frequent and comprehensive eye examinations, providers are better able to delay the potential onset and slow myopia progression rather than just correcting the visual symptoms experienced later in life.

Given these concerns, we would like to know what the CDC is currently doing to encourage early detection and prevention of myopia. Specifically:

Please outline any current initiatives by the CDC related to childhood myopia;

- What level of outreach does the CDC do to inform parents, children, educators and/or providers about prevention techniques, symptoms and treatment of childhood myopia?
- Does the CDC have official recommendations for providers on the subject of childhood myopia?
- Are there any outreach plans or recommendations under discussion for the future?

Our hope is that working together, we can tackle this disease, and prevent lifelong complications for many Americans. We appreciate your dedication to eye health and stand ready to work with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Angie Craig  
Member of Congress



John Joyce, M.D.  
Member of Congress

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<sup>5</sup> Haarman AEG, Enthoven CA, Tideman JWL, Tedja MS, Verhoeven VJM, Klaver CCW. The Complications of Myopia: A Review and Meta-Analysis. Invest Ophthalmol Vis Sci. 2020;61(4):49.

<sup>6</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention. "Keep an Eye on Your Vision Health." (2020).

<sup>7</sup> American Optometric Association. "Championing children's eyecare." (2019).



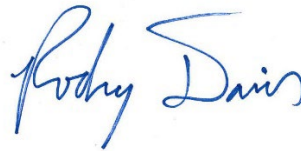
Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress



Carlos A. Gimenez  
Member of Congress



Lauren Underwood  
Member of Congress



Rodney Davis  
Member of Congress



Jim Costa  
Member of Congress

/s/

Ron Kind  
Member of Congress



Cynthia Axne  
Member of Congress



Troy Balderson  
Member of Congress



Al Lawson  
Member of Congress



John H. Rutherford  
Member of Congress

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Ann McLane Kuster  
Member of Congress

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Guy Reschenthaler  
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael Guest".

Michael Guest  
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Karen Bass".

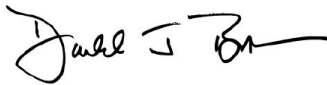
Karen Bass  
Member of Congress

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Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress

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Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Don Bacon".

Don Bacon  
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Steve Palazzo".

Steve Palazzo  
Member of Congress

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Kim Schrier, M.D.  
Member of Congress

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Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress



Tom O'Halleran  
Member of Congress



Tony Cárdenas  
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