Cosmetic Contact Lenses

The demand for cosmetic contact lenses continues to increase, particularly among teenage girls and young women. Colored contact lenses are one of the fastest growing segments — 6 percent annual increase — of the U.S. contact lens industry.

Is It Illegal to Sell Contact Lenses Without a Prescription in South Carolina?

Yes. In South Carolina it is illegal to sell or dispense contact lenses without a valid, unexpired contact lens prescription from a licensed optometrist or ophthalmologist. This is true even if you are selling color contacts or special effect contacts for cosmetic reasons only.

Do Cosmetic Contact Lenses Correct Vision?

No. Cosmetic contact lenses do not correct vision. They are worn solely to change the appearance of the eyes. The lenses have several names: Plano, Zero-Powered, Non-Corrective, Decorative, Cosmetic, Costume, Novelty, Theatrical, Color, Special Effects or Decorative Tint. Some of these lenses , which are especially popular at Halloween, display designs, like animal eyes or sports logos.

Should All Contact Lenses be Fitted by an Eye Care Professional?

Yes. All contact lenses — even decorative lenses not intended to correct vision problems — need to be fitted by an eye care professional and properly maintained.

Are Their Risks Associated With Wearing Cosmetic Contact Lenses?

Yes. There are several risks associated with the wearing of cosmetic contact lenses that are not professionally prescribed. They include:

● Corneal ulcers, especially if you wear the contacts longer than the recommended period. Corneal ulcers can progress rapidly. In the most severe cases, this condition can result in blindness and eye loss.
● Infection of the eye
● Corneal swelling
● Allergic reaction
● Corneal abrasion (cut) due to poor lens fit
● Reduction in sight
● Contrast sensitivity
● Sensitivity to light
● Tight Lens Syndrome. Tight lens syndrome is the group of symptoms that occur when a soft contact lens fits too tightly and starts to stick to the cornea.

Gonococcal Conjunctivitis
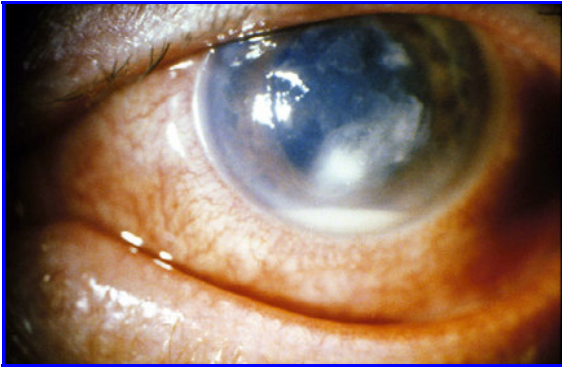Courtesy, Pacific University College of Optometry

Are There Other Risks To Consider?

● Smokers are eight times more likely to develop corneal ulcers than non-smokers, no matter what type of contact lens they wear.
● HIV remains a potential concern because the virus has been isolated from contact lenses, corneal tissue and tears of patients with AIDS.

What Should You Do If You Are Considering Getting Cosmetic Contact Lenses?

● Get an eye exam from a licensed eye care professional.
● Get a valid prescription that includes the proper size, shape, power and brand of lens.
● Buy the lenses from an eye care professional or from a vendor who requires that you provide prescription information for the lenses.
● Follow directions for cleaning, disinfection and wearing the lenses.
● Visit your eye care professional for follow-up eye exams.

• NEVER swap, borrow, or buy someone else's lenses. When you share contacts, you also share body fluids, increasing the odds of a variety of infections.

• NEVER use saliva on lenses. Saliva is full of bacteria. "If you give your lenses a spit bath, you might as well rub them on the floor."

Serratia Ulcer
Courtesy, Columbia Eye Clinic

Where Can Consumers Report a Business Selling Cosmetic Contact Lenses Without a Prescription?

● Tell your eye care professional;

● Notify the S.C. Department of Consumer Affairs, 803.734.4200, 1.800.592.1594, (toll-free in South Carolina), 3600 Forest Drive, Third Floor, Columbia, SC 29204, or e-mail, contactlenses@dca.state.sc.us.

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs
Post Office Box 5757
Columbia, South Carolina 29250-5757

Fast Facts *for* Teens

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South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs
Post Office Box 5757, Columbia, SC 29250-5757
803.734.4200, or toll-free statewide:
1.800.922.1594
Web site: www.scconsumer.gov