

# NEWS FROM SCDCA

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs



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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **HEALTH/SAFETY ALERT: COSMETIC CONTACT LENSES MAY NOT BE A SAFE COSTUME ACCESSORY**

**Columbia, SC...**With Halloween just around the corner, the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs issued a warning parents and children about the sale of decorative/cosmetic lenses without a prescription. The final touches on many costumes this season often include colored or decorative contact lenses, one of the fastest growing segments in the US contact lens industry. Currently, over three million Americans wear cosmetic contact lenses. These accessories, however, pose serious health risks if not properly prescribed and fitted by a health professional – risks that range from swelling and infection to blindness and possible eye loss.

#### **The Law:**

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. The Department of Consumer Affairs can issue fines of up to \$5,000 to persons and businesses that violate this law. The Department has recently fined a business for the illegal sale of cosmetic contact lenses and is currently investigating a number of other businesses.

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#### **About the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs:**

Established by the Consumer Protection code in 1974, The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs represents the interests of South Carolina Consumers. Our mission is to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education.

For more information, visit [www.sconsumer.gov](http://www.sconsumer.gov).

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## What You Should Know:

Consumers should know that serious health complications are also associated with contact lenses not being fitted by a licensed eye care professional and lenses that are not properly maintained. Decorative contact lenses do not provide corrective vision. Smokers are eight times more likely to develop corneal ulcers. HIV remains a potential concern because the virus has been isolated from contact lenses, corneal tissue and tears of patients with AIDS. Antihistamines, birth control pills, alcohol and air travel, all conditions that tend to cause dryness in the eyes, may also increase the risk of infection from contact lenses.

## What You Should Do:

Before getting decorative contact lenses, consumers should follow all precautions.

- Get an eye exam from a licensed professional.
- Obtain a prescription that includes the size, shape, power and brand of the lens. Many problems occur from decorative contact lenses that are too small and constrict the eyeball.
- Follow instructions provided by the health care professional for cleaning and wearing the lenses.
- Schedule a follow-up appointment with your eye care professional.

Consumers can find out more information about decorative or colored contact lenses by viewing the Department's publication [Fast Facts for Teens: Decorative Contact Lenses](#) or by contacting the Public Information Division at 803.734.4190, toll-free at 1.800.922.1594 or online at [www.sconsumer.gov](http://www.sconsumer.gov).

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