

DH appeals to students to take measures to protect vision and enrol in annual health assessment service

The Department of Health (DH) today (October 3) reminds students to take measures to protect their vision and appeals to them to enrol in the annual health assessment service of the DH's Student Health Service (SHS).

While the World Health Organization has announced that the COVID-19 epidemic situation no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern, the health of students in Hong Kong was affected by the epidemic.

The SHS provides visual acuity test for all primary and secondary school students during their annual health assessment at the Student Health Service Centres (SHSCs). The SHS recently reviewed the relevant health data of students attending the SHSCs and noted the deteriorated vision of students in recent years, especially among lower grade primary students. The percentage of those wearing glasses among Primary One students remained stable at 11 per cent from the 2015/16 school year to 2019/20, but increased to 15 per cent in 2020/21 and levelled till 2022/23. The overall percentage of primary and secondary school students referred to the optometry service of the SHS also increased from 9.4 per cent in 2018/19 to 16.7 per cent in 2020/21 followed by a slight drop to 13.2 per cent in 2022/23.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, students had less participation in outdoor activities and spent more time online with electronic screen products, leading to a marked increase in screen time in primary and secondary students. According to the analysis of questionnaires received by SHSCs, the percentage of primary students who spent two hours or more a day on the Internet or electronic screen products for purposes not related to school work on a typical school day increased from 25.8 per cent in 2015/16 to 32.2 per cent in 2018/19. It further increased to 50.1 per cent in 2021/22 before its slight drop to 47.3 per cent in 2022/23. A similar pattern was also observed among secondary students with the percentage increased from 65.0 per cent in 2015/16 to 81.2 per cent in 2021/22, followed by a mild drop to 78.1 per cent in 2022/23.

The DH reminds students to adopt the following health tips to protect their vision when using electronic screen products:

- Use proper lighting and reduce glare on the device screen;
- Keep a proper distance and posture for screen viewing;
- Take rest: follow the 20-20-20 rule (take a 20-second break to view something at least 20 feet away for every 20 minutes);
- Follow the 30-40-50 principle: keep a reading distance no less than 50 centimetres for computers, 40cm for tablet personal computers and 30cm for smartphones;

- Blink frequently; and
- Conduct regular eye checks and adopt good viewing habits.

A spokesman for the DH said that the visual acuity test provided by the SHS is a screening test which aims to detect as early as possible visual acuity problems of the students, and whether the problems so detected have already been appropriately corrected (including wearing suitable glasses). Those who fail the visual acuity test will be referred to optometrists of the DH's Special Assessment Centre (SAC) for further visual assessment. Parents of the students may also choose to consult private optometrists for assessments and follow-up. In addition, the SHS will provide a stereoscopic vision test for Primary One students attending SHSCs (or those at their first visit) to discover visual problems, including amblyopia and squint, for follow-up.

The SHS had been conducting visual acuity tests for more than 400 000 students per year before the service was interrupted by the COVID-19 epidemic. The SHS will [resume its annual health assessment service](#) to all grades of primary and secondary students during the school year 2023/24.

In addition to the vision screenings, students enrolled with the SHS will be given an annual appointment to attend an SHSC for a series of health services designed to cater for health needs at various stages of their development. Such services include physical examinations; screenings for health problems related to growth, nutrition, vision, hearing, scoliosis, psychosocial health and behaviour; individual counselling; health education and vaccination. Students found to have health problems will be referred to an SAC, specialist clinic of the Hospital Authority or other appropriate organisations for a detailed assessment and follow-up.

Enrolment is now open for the annual health assessment service of the 2023/24 school year. Students who have not yet enrolled are encouraged to enrol through their school or enrol directly with the SHSCs. The enrolment form and relevant information are available at the [SHS web page](#).

The DH will continue to provide vision screening services at the SHSCs, individual health advice and appropriate referrals, coupled with relevant health promotion activities, to protect the vision and eye health of students.