



Frequently Asked Questions about vision screening of four and five year olds

Vision Screening

1. [What is screening?](#)
2. [Which children have their vision screened?](#)
3. [Does vision screening detect all vision problems?](#)
4. [What is amblyopia \(lazy eye\)?](#)
5. [What signs should I look for which may point to a vision problem?](#)
6. [Who will screen my child and when?](#)
7. [Where is this screening done?](#)
8. [Why is having good vision important for children?](#)

Full vision assessments

9. [Why should I take my child to have their vision assessed?](#)
10. [Who will pay for the assessment?](#)
11. [Why has my child been referred for an assessment?](#)
12. [What is an assessment?](#)
13. [Who will conduct the assessment?](#)
14. [If my child is referred for a full assessment, how do I prepare for this?](#)
15. [What if the assessment shows my child has a vision problem?](#)
16. [What if the assessment shows my child has good vision?](#)
17. [What will happen in the full assessment?](#)

More information

18. [Where can I get more information about vision screening?](#)

Vision Screening

1. What is screening?

Screening is a good way to identify children who may be at increased risk of having or developing amblyopia (lazy eye). Children who are likely to have this condition can then be assessed and provided with treatment.

2. Which children have their vision screened?

Parents of children who are four years of age will be offered vision screening for their child as part of the [B4 School Check](#).

Parents of children who don't get this screen before they reach school at five will be offered a vision screen for their child when they are at school. Children in Year 7 (around 11 years old) are also screened for some vision problems at school.

3. Does vision screening detect all vision problems?

No. The aim of the B4 school vision screening is to identify children who may have an uncommon, but serious, vision condition called amblyopia. This is sometimes called 'lazy eye'. By detecting amblyopia and treating it early, help can be given to the child to fix this problem.

4. What is amblyopia (lazy eye)?

Amblyopia usually happens when one eye, which may have hyperopia (long-sighted), myopia (short-sighted) or astigmatism (blurry vision) sends a blurred picture to the part of the brain which processes vision. After a while the brain stops paying as much attention to the blurred picture from that eye.

Amblyopia can also occur when the two eyes are not aligned correctly. To avoid double vision the brain stops paying as much attention to the picture from the 'turned' eye. The eye that the brain has stopped paying attention to is called the 'lazy eye'.

Children who are screened for amblyopia may be found to have other vision problems when they are assessed, but the main purpose of vision screening is to detect amblyopia.

By detecting amblyopia and treating it early, help can be given to the child to fix this problem.

5. What signs should I look for which may point to a vision problem?

If your child has learning or reading difficulties, is clumsier than usual for their age, screws his or her eyes up or tilts his/her head to see, or has frequent headaches, this may mean he/she has a vision problem. If your child does have a vision problem, finding it early is good for their learning and development.

6. Who will screen my child and when?

The B4 School Check is being offered to all families of four year old children. The vision screening is done by Vision Hearing Technicians who are trained to work with young children and do the tests involved. The Vision Hearing Technicians are also known as 'VHTs'. In some areas a nurse may do the B4SC vision screen.

7. Where is this screening done?

Vision screening is done across New Zealand, free of charge, as part of the B4 School Check. Where the screening is done will vary between DHBs. The checks could take place at a doctor's clinic, a preschool or early childhood centre, a kōhanga reo, or another community centre or school.

8. Why is having good vision important for children?

Good vision is important for children as it has been estimated that as much as 80% of the learning a child does occurs through his or her eyes.

Detecting vision problems early is important so that help can be given to your child.

Full vision assessments

9. Why should I take my child to have their vision assessed?

If your child is referred from the vision screen it is important that you get your child's vision assessed. This is the only way to be sure about your child's vision.

It is important to find any vision problems which may exist early so help can be given to your child. Having good vision is important for learning and development.

10. Who will pay for the assessment?

You can get your child's vision assessed at the hospital or by an optometrist or ophthalmologist. There is no charge for assessments done at the hospital.

If you get your child's vision assessed by an optometrist or ophthalmologist (outside the hospital) you can check the cost of the vision test when you phone to make the appointment.

There is a Spectacles Subsidy which may help with the costs of your child's vision test and/or glasses (frames and lenses or repairs) or eye patches. To qualify, your child needs to be under the age of 16, and your family or child needs a Community Services or High Health Use Card.

To find out more about this subsidy, you can click [here](#).

11. Why has my child been referred for a vision assessment?

Your child has been referred as there may be a problem with your child's vision. Taking your child for an assessment is important as it is the best way to be sure about your child's vision. Finding vision problems early is important for learning and development.

12. What is an assessment?

A full assessment is a series of tests which will confirm whether your child has a vision problem. They are done by an eye professional such as an optometrist, orthoptist or ophthalmologist (eye doctor).

13. Who will conduct the assessment?

Your child's assessment will be done by either an optometrist, orthoptist or ophthalmologist:

- **Optometrists** are professionals trained to diagnose and measure vision problems and eye disease, prescribe eyeglasses and contact lenses, and prescribe drugs to treat eye disorders. In addition to developing a plan for treatment and supplying prescriptions they also provide vision therapy and low vision rehabilitation.
- **Orthoptists** are professionals trained in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of squints, amblyopia and eye movement problems. Most of their patients are children, as squints and amblyopia usually need treatment during early childhood. Orthoptists often work in hospital eye clinics alongside ophthalmologists.
- **Ophthalmologists** are specialist doctors who are trained to provide the full spectrum of eye care from prescribing glasses to eye surgery.

14. If my child is referred for a full assessment, how do I prepare for this?

There is nothing you need to do to prepare your child for a full assessment of their vision. You can ask how long the assessment will take when you make the appointment. Although you are welcome to bring other family members to the appointment, it makes the testing run more smoothly if there are no distractions while the tests are being done.

15. What if the assessment shows my child has a vision problem?

You will get information about the help available for your child. You can plan what you would like to do next with the eye-care professional.

16. What if the assessment shows my child has good vision?

Even though your child was referred from the vision screen, the more extensive testing may find no important problems. It is important that you take your child to the assessment so you can be sure about your child's vision.

17. What will happen in the assessment?

Your child's assessment may include some or all of the following:

- You may be asked questions about your child's medical history and behaviour. Some of these questions may not appear to relate to vision but they are important for the professional to get a full picture of things which may be relevant.
- The professional will examine your child's eyes and they might ask the child to look in different directions. During the examination they may dim the lights at times. This is normal.
- They will also need to look at the child's eyes through equipment that magnifies the eye.
- There may be some drops put in your child's eyes to make their pupil bigger – this may be uncomfortable but this is important and any discomfort the child experiences won't last long.
- They will also need to use the equipment to look through the pupil to the inside of the eye and this will involve using a bright light. Although the light is bright this doesn't hurt your child's eyes.
- They may use a machine to try different kinds of lenses in front of your child's eyes – this checks how well they see at varying distances.
- Books or handheld charts may also be used.

More information

18. Where can I get more information about vision screening?

For further information about children's vision screening call the Ministry of Health's free 24-hour health advice service, Healthline (0800 611 116) – or you can talk to your the vision hearing technician who screened your child, an optometrist, ophthalmologist or family doctor.