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- [Site Navigation](#)
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## Navigation

[Home](#) [Close Menu](#)

- - [Conversation-Going-travelling](#)
- [Conditions and treatments](#)
  - [Conditions and treatments](#)
    - [Allergies](#)
      - [Allergies](#)
        - [Allergic reaction to packaged food](#)
    - [Anxiety](#)
    - [Arthritis](#)
    - [Asthma](#)
    - [Behavioural conditions](#)
    - [Birth defects](#)
    - [Blood and blood vessels](#)
    - [Bones muscles and joints](#)
      - [Bones muscles and joints](#)
        - [Foot care - podiatrists](#)
    - [Brain and nerves](#)
    - [Cancer](#)
    - [Complementary and alternative care](#)
    - [Dementia](#)
  - [Healthy living](#)
    - [Healthy living](#)
      - [Alcohol](#)
      - [Babies and toddlers \(0-3\)](#)
      - [Children \(4-12\)](#)
      - [Drugs and addictive behaviours](#)

- [Environmental health](#)
- [Family Violence](#)
- [Older people in hospital – Get well soon](#)
- [Health checks](#)
- [Healthy Eating](#)
  - [Nutrition for life](#)
- [Healthy mind](#)
- [Healthy pregnancy](#)
- [Immunisation](#)
- [Services and support](#)
  - [Services and support](#)
  - [Aged care services](#)
  - [Alcohol and drug services](#)
  - [LGBTI support](#)
  - [Carers, caring and respite care services](#)
  - [Child, family and relationship services](#)
  - [Disability services](#)
  - [Emergency, crisis and support services](#)
  - [End of life and palliative care services](#)
  - [Hospitals, surgery and procedures](#)
  - [Mental health services](#)
  - [Planning and coordinating healthcare](#)
  - [Pregnancy and birth services](#)
- [A-Z](#)
  - [A-Z](#)
  - [Conditions and treatments](#)
  - [Healthy living](#)
  - [Services and support](#)
  - [Videos](#)
  - [Service profiles](#)
- [Blog](#)
  - [Blog](#)
  - [Blog authors](#)
  - [Topics](#)
- [Podcast](#)
  - [Podcast](#)
  - [Influenza - Dr Brett Sutton & Prof Kanta Subbarao](#)
  - [Trauma - Anne Leadbeater OAM & Dr Rob Gordon](#)
  - [template](#)
- [Other sites](#)
  -  [Health.vic](#)  [DHHS](#)  [Seniors Online](#)
- [Sitemap](#)
- [My Health Life](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Googleplus](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Youtube](#)
- [Rss](#)
- [Conditions and treatments](#)
- [Healthy living](#)
- [Services and support](#)
- [A-Z](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [Podcast](#)



[Back to Safety](#)

- [Home](#)
- [Healthy living](#)
- [Safety](#)
- Eye safety at work

## Eye safety at work

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- [Safety - Work and environmental safety](#)
- [Work](#)
- [Work - Environmental health and safety](#)

## Summary

- Any job that involves airborne particles or hazardous substances carries a risk of eye injury.
- Handling chemicals under high pressure or managing a strap under tension, which may suddenly release, are added risks.
- Wearing eye protection appropriate for the task can significantly reduce the risk of injury.
- Organisations such as RANZCO, Optometry Australia and WorkSafe Victoria can offer information and advice on appropriate eye protection for the workplace and practices to reduce the risk of eye injuries.

Most eye injuries in Australia are minor, but some workplace accidents can result in serious injury, vision loss or blindness. Any job that involves airborne particles or hazardous substances carries a risk of eye injury. Handling chemicals under high pressure or managing a strap under tension, which may suddenly release, are added risks.

The eye is extremely delicate and permanent vision loss can result from a relatively minor injury.

Ordinary eye wear does not adequately protect you against injury. In fact, contact lenses may make an eye injury worse. In Australia, men of working age are most at risk of serious eye injuries.

The risk of workplace eye injuries is reduced if proper prevention measures are followed. Pay attention to your working environment and always wear eye protection when you are required to do high-risk work.

## High-risk jobs and eye safety

Jobs that pose a high risk for eye injury include those that involve:

- chemicals
- dusty environments
- excessively bright lights or UV lights
- compressed air
- machines or tools that chip, chisel, cut, drill, grind, hammer, sand, smelt, spray or weld.

## Types of eye injuries

Different types of eye injury include:

- scratches or cuts to the surface of the eye
- punctures
- embedded foreign bodies in or on the eye
- chemical burns
- welding flashes (injury caused by bright UV light).

## Risk factors for eye injuries

Factors in the workplace that increase the risk of eye injury may include:

- The employer doesn't supply any eye protection.
- The employer supplies eye protection, but workers won't wear it.
- The employer doesn't enforce the use of eye protection or train the workers in how to use protection equipment.
- Neither the employer nor the workers appreciate the potential for injury and don't think to use eye protection.
- The eye protection is inadequate, such as the use of glasses when the job requires a face shield.
- The eye protection doesn't fit properly – for example, the glasses are loose and allow particles to enter from the sides.
- Only the operator of the machine wears eye protection, so anyone in the vicinity who is not wearing eye protection is at risk from flying particles.
- The workers don't know how to properly operate the equipment or tools.
- The equipment isn't maintained in good repair.
- Work involves the use of metal on metal, such as hammer and chisel injuries.

## Identify potential eye injury hazards

To improve eye safety at work, you must first identify any hazards. Suggestions include:

- Walk through the workplace and look for potential hazards.

- Talk over risk factors with workers.
- Check through injury records to help pinpoint recurring problems.
- Ask WorkSafe Victoria for advice and information.

## Control eye injury hazards

Reduce the risk of eye injury by controlling the potential hazards. Suggestions include:

- Replace high-risk equipment and toxic chemicals with safer alternatives wherever possible.
- Move high-risk equipment to an isolated area.
- Install safety barriers.
- Maintain equipment and make sure all safety devices, including guards or shields, are in good working order.
- Signpost work areas and equipment that require eye protection.
- Use water to dampen dusty environments.
- Manage fumes or dust with exhaust hoods, extractor fans or similar.
- Read the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) that the manufacturer supplies with the hazardous substance and comply with all instructions.
- Run regular safety training sessions for the workers.
- Provide adequate first aid equipment.
- Consult with WorkSafe Victoria for more information.

## Use eye protection at work

Wearing eye protection appropriate for the task can significantly reduce the risk of injury. Always buy eye protection that complies with Australian Standards.

General recommendations include:

- **low impact protection** – for tasks including chipping, riveting, spalling, hammering and managing a strap under tension. Recommended protection includes safety glasses, safety glasses with side shields, safety clip-ons, eye cup goggles, wide vision goggles, eye shields and face shields. Choose items with the Australian Standards mark:
- **medium impact protection** – for tasks including scaling, grinding and machining metals, some woodworking tasks, stone dressing, wire handling and brick cutting. Recommended protection includes safety glasses with side shields, safety clip-ons, eye cup goggles, wide vision goggles, eye shields and face shields. Choose items marked with the Australian Standards mark, and with the letter ‘I’ to signify it is appropriate for medium impact protection
- **high impact protection** – for tasks including explosive power tools and nail guns. Recommended protection includes face shields marked with the Australian Standards mark, and with the letter ‘V’ to signify it is appropriate for high impact protection
- **welding protection** – filters and shields marked with the Australian Standards mark
- **chemical handling** – wide-vision goggles, eye shields or face shields marked with the Australian Standards mark and the letter ‘C’ to signify it is splashproof and appropriate for chemical handling
- **dust** – goggles marked with the Australian Standards mark and the letter ‘D’ to signify it is appropriate for protection against dust.



## Prescription glasses, sunglasses and contact lenses

In most cases, ordinary eyewear such as prescription glasses, sunglasses and contact lenses do not offer adequate protection against injury.

Contact lenses may worsen an eye injury. For example, a chemical splashed in the eye may concentrate within or beneath the contact lens. Appropriate eye protection must be worn even if you wear prescription glasses, sunglasses or contact lenses.

## First aid – general suggestions

In all cases of eye injury, seek immediate medical help. Injuries that seem minor can sometimes cause permanent damage, including vision loss. First aid treatment differs slightly depending on the type of injury.

Suggestions include:

- cuts, punctures or embedded objects – do not rub the eye. Do not wash or flush the eye. Do not try to remove an embedded object. Gently cover the injured eye with an eye pad or shield secured with tape
- dust or loose particles – do not rub the eye. Flush the dust or loose particles with clean water
- chemical splash – do not rub the eye. Flush with clean running water for at least 15 minutes. You may need to hold the eye open with clean fingers. Alkaline chemicals are especially dangerous to the eyes, so take particular care that these chemicals, especially powders, are flushed from the area thoroughly.

These first aid suggestions are not a substitute for first aid training or professional medical help.

## Where to get help

- In an emergency, call triple zero (000)
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital
- Your doctor
- Optometrist
- Ophthalmologist
- Your manager or supervisor

- Your elected occupational health and safety (OH&S) representative and your workplace OH&S coordinator
- [WorkSafe Victoria](#). Tel. (03) 9641 1555 or 1800 136 089 (toll free) – for general enquiries
- WorkSafe Victoria Emergency Response Line Tel. 13 23 60 – to report serious workplace emergencies (24 hours, 7 days)
- [Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists](#). (RANZCO) Tel. (02) 9690 1001
- [Optometry Australia](#). Tel. (03) 9652 9100

#### References

- [Eye safety](#), Optometrists Association Australia.
- [Eye-related injuries in Australia](#), 2009, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Australian Government.

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Please note that we cannot answer personal medical queries.

If you are looking for health or medical advice we recommend that you:

- talk to your doctor or pharmacist
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- [Safety basics](#)
- [Child safety](#)
- [Safety in and around the home](#)
- [Safe lifestyle and entertainment](#)
- [Outdoor, weather and sports safety](#)
- [Travel and transport safety](#)
- [Fire, flood and other disasters](#)
- [Work and environmental safety](#)
- [Farm safety](#)

#### Safety basics

- [Bites and stings – first aid](#)  
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- [How to survive a rip current \(video\)](#)  
[Learn what to do if you find yourself in a rip current...](#)
- [Ladder safety matters – Mick \(video\)](#)  
[Stop and think before you use a ladder...](#)
- [Ladder safety matters – Nick \(video\)](#)  
[Stop and think before you use a ladder...](#)
- [Ladders Safety Matters - Paul \(video\)](#)  
[We can keep our pools safe, healthy, and most importantly fun...](#)
- [Look after your health at harvest time \(slideshow\)](#)  
[Farmer health, wellbeing and safety are often neglected when facing the pressures of harvest. Simple safety measures can dramatically reduce the risk of injury and illness...](#)

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- [Animals and child safety](#)  
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- [Water safety for children](#)

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#### **Safety in and around the home**

- [Animals and child safety](#)

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- [Ladder safety matters – Mick \(video\)](#)  
[Stop and think before you use a ladder...](#)
- [Ladder safety matters – Nick \(video\)](#)  
[Stop and think before you use a ladder...](#)
- [Ladder Safety – Mick's story](#)  
[Injuries associated with ladder falls have been steadily increasing in Australia, especially among men aged 60 years and older doing work in and around the home...](#)
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- [Ladder Safety – Paul's story](#)  
[Paul was sanding the exterior of his house when he overreached and fell more than two metres from his ladder...](#)
- [Ladders Safety Matters - Paul \(video\)](#)  
[We can keep our pools safe, healthy, and most importantly fun...](#)
- [Look after your health at harvest time \(slideshow\)](#)  
[Farmer health, wellbeing and safety are often neglected when facing the pressures of harvest. Simple safety measures can dramatically reduce the risk of injury and illness...](#)
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[Check your swimming pool regularly to make sure the water is safe for swimming...](#)
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[There are many ways to improve home safety for people whose vision is deteriorating...](#)
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[Make sure your private drinking water supply is safe...](#)
- [Water safety for children](#)  
[Toddlers are most at risk of drowning because they are mobile and curious but don't understand the danger of water...](#)

#### **Safe lifestyle and entertainment**

- [Internet safety for children](#)  
[A child's digital footprint can be as easy to follow as their real footprints...](#)
- [Mobile phone safety for children](#)  
[Teach your child strategies for responding to mobile phone bullying...](#)
- [Partying safely – tips for teenagers](#)  
[Don't advertise a party via SMS or the internet to limit the risk of gate-crashers and violent situations...](#)
- [Solariums \(sunbeds and tanning beds\)](#)  
[There is no such thing as a safe solarium tan...](#)



## Outdoor, weather and sports safety

- [Exercise safety](#)  
[Training too hard or fast is a common cause of sports-related injuries...](#)
- [Heat stress and heat-related illness](#)  
[Heat kills more Australians than any natural disaster. Find out how you can treat and prevent heat-related illness...](#)
- [Heat stress and older people](#)  
[People aged 65 years and over are at increased risk of heat-related illnesses and need special care in hot weather...](#)
- [Heat stress – preventing heatstroke](#)  
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- [Hot weather and child safety](#)  
[Babies and children can quickly lose body fluids in hot weather, which can lead to dehydration...](#)
- [How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat](#)  
[Know the effects of extreme heat, who is at risk and how you can prepare yourself and others...](#)
- [How to survive a rip current \(video\)](#)  
[Learn what to do if you find yourself in a rip current...](#)
- [Hypothermia](#)  
[The early responses to hypothermia will be moving around, seeking shelter, hair standing on end \(goosebumps\) and shivering...](#)
- [Walking - safety and environmental issues](#)  
[Choose a route that is appropriate for your age and fitness level. Warm up and cool down with a slow, gentle pace to ease in and out of your exercise session...](#)
- [Water from natural resources](#)  
[Drinking untreated water, such as creek water, bore water and sometimes even rainwater can lead to illnesses including gastroenteritis...](#)
- [Water safety for children](#)  
[Toddlers are most at risk of drowning because they are mobile and curious but don't understand the danger of water...](#)

## Travel and transport safety

- [Bicycle safety and children](#)  
[As they grow and develop, and with the help of adults, children become increasingly aware of how they can manage their own safety and become safer road and bicycle users...](#)
- [Child safety in the car](#)  
[Taking care to restrain children correctly while travelling in a car is the best way to prevent injuries...](#)
- [Look after your health at harvest time \(slideshow\)](#)  
[Farmer health, wellbeing and safety are often neglected when facing the pressures of harvest. Simple safety measures can dramatically reduce the risk of injury and illness...](#)
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[Motor vehicle crashes continue to be one of the biggest killers and causes of injury in Victoria...](#)
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[As they grow and develop, and with the help of adults, children become increasingly aware of how they can manage their own safety, and become safer road users...](#)
- [Safe driving](#)  
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- [Scooters and child safety](#)  
[Scooters can travel at fast speeds and falls and collisions are disturbingly common...](#)
- [Travel safety tips](#)  
[You can reduce your risk of being mugged or robbed while travelling by taking a few simple precautions...](#)

## Fire, flood and other disasters

- [After a flood – animal and insect related hazards](#)  
[When returning to a flood-affected area, remember that wild animals, including rats, mice, snakes or spiders, may be trapped in your home, shed or garden...](#)
- [After a flood – returning home safely](#)  
[When returning to your home after a flood, take precautions to reduce the possibility of injury, illness or disease...](#)
- [Bushfire aftermath - safety tips](#)  
[Houses, sheds and other buildings or structures burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards...](#)
- [Bushfire preparation advice](#)  
[Being prepared for a bushfire helps you cope better in an emergency...](#)
- [Bushfire smoke](#)  
[Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health...](#)
- [Emergencies - floods](#)  
[You and your family should work out an emergency plan in case of flood...](#)
- [Smoke from planned burns](#)  
[Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health. Planned burns are an important part of reducing the risk of bushfires...](#)
- [Talking to children about bushfire risk](#)  
[Children can be affected by information regarding bushfire risk and they may become concerned about issues of safety. Talking to children openly in a way that suits their age, while also involving...](#)
- [Urban flash floods - FAQs](#)  
[Urban flash flooding can happen quickly and without warning. Heavy rain causes runoff to collect in dips, car parks and roads, and there is a risk of contamination, injury and disease...](#)

## Work and environmental safety

- [Asbestos and your health](#)  
[When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs...](#)
- [Cadmium](#)  
[Low-level exposure to cadmium over a long period of time may cause health effects because cadmium can accumulate in the body...](#)
- [Computer-related injuries](#)  
[Using a computer can contribute to problems of the muscles and joints, eyestrain and overuse injuries of the arms, wrists and hands...](#)
- [Eye safety at work](#)  
[Wearing eye protection appropriate for the task can significantly reduce the risk of injury...](#)
- [Ladder safety matters – Mick \(video\)](#)  
[Stop and think before you use a ladder...](#)
- [Ladder safety matters – Nick \(video\)](#)  
[Stop and think before you use a ladder...](#)
- [Ladders Safety Matters - Paul \(video\)](#)  
[We can keep our pools safe, healthy, and most importantly fun...](#)
- [Look after your health at harvest time \(slideshow\)](#)  
[Farmer health, wellbeing and safety are often neglected when facing the pressures of harvest. Simple safety measures can dramatically reduce the risk of injury and illness...](#)
- [Q fever](#)  
[Q fever is caused by a micro-organism that can be carried by cattle, sheep and goats...](#)
- [Shiftwork](#)

[A person working the night shift is at greater risk of various disorders and accidents...](#)

- [Skin cancer - protecting outdoor workers](#)

[People who work outdoors are in one of the highest risk groups for skin cancer...](#)

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[There are many ways to reduce exposure to excessive noise in the workplace...](#)

- [Workplace safety - overuse injuries](#)

[Occupational overuse syndrome, also known as RSI, is caused by repetitive movements or awkward postures...](#)

#### **Farm safety**

- [Chemicals and spray drift](#)

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- [Farm safety and handling agrichemicals](#)

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- [Farm safety – children](#)

[Children who live on farms are at greater risk of injury and death than their parents or other farm workers...](#)

- [Farm safety - confined spaces](#)

[Any confined space on a farm can be dangerous and the threat may not be apparent until it's too late...](#)

- [Farm safety - crush injuries](#)

[Hand and finger injuries are the most common crush injuries that occur on Victorian farms...](#)

- [Farm safety - falls](#)

[Falls are a common farm hazard, especially for older farmers...](#)

- [Farm safety - handling animals](#)

[Any animal-handling practices can increase the risk of injury to farmers, farm workers and the animal...](#)

- [Farm safety - machinery](#)

[Poorly used or faulty machinery is a major cause of death and injury on farms...](#)

- [Farm safety - manual handling](#)

[Farm workers often experience muscle and ligament strain, but good manual handling techniques and safe work habits can prevent most injuries...](#)

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- [Farm safety - risks and hazards](#)

[Farms can be dangerous places for workers and family members, but the risks can be reduced...](#)

- [Farm safety – sheep and shearing](#)

[Handling sheep can cause manual injuries and badly designed shearing sheds can present a range of hazards...](#)

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[Home](#)

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