

The blinding truth – fireworks and the dangers they pose to your eyes

20 June 2016, by Adam Pope

FIREWORKS EYE SAFETY

SIX TIPS FOR SAFE EYES

- ★ Always wear safety glasses
- ★ Never allow children to play with or ignite fireworks
- ★ Don't try to re-light or pick up fireworks that have not ignited fully
- ★ Keep a water source close by
- ★ Make sure fireworks are legal in your area before buying or using them
- ★ Light fireworks one at a time and keep your distance

TYPICAL EYE INJURIES FROM FIREWORKS

- ★ Detached retina*
- ★ Ruptured eyeball*
- ★ Scratches on cornea
- ★ Eye burns

*Potentially blinding injuries

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Fireworks are big business in the United States. The American Pyrotechnics Association estimated consumers spent \$755 million on fireworks in

2015, and according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, fireworks were involved in an estimated 10,500 injuries treated in U.S. hospital emergency departments in 2014.

Nearly 400 people lose sight in one or both eyes due to fireworks injuries every year.

Ophthalmologists at the UAB Callahan Eye Hospital hope that number will decrease.

"I've seen too many injuries related to fireworks, and many of these occur in children and innocent bystanders, and result in permanent vision loss," said Priscilla Fowler, M.D., assistant professor in the UAB Department of Ophthalmology.

The UAB Callahan Eye Hospital is the safety sponsor for Birmingham's Thunder on the Mountain fireworks show, and hospital officials strongly recommend that professional shows are the best way to enjoy fireworks.

"It's better to just leave the fireworks alone and go to a show like Thunder on the Mountain and let the professionals do it," said Jay McCollum, M.D., an ophthalmologist and director of emergency services at the UAB Callahan Eye Hospital. "That's the safest thing."

But a doctor's recommendation will not be enough to stop everyone from using fireworks. Doctors at Callahan Eye Hospital know they will be busy on Independence Day, and they are ready.

UAB Callahan Eye Hospital has a 24-hour emergency room and the ability to perform surgery relatively quickly.

"We have the equipment, the staff and the surgical backup to deal with any type of [eye injury](#)," McCollum said. "We're the only eye emergency room in the state of Alabama and one of only a handful in the country. We're available 24/7, and if

there is a question about an eye injury of any kind, we encourage people to come in and let us take a look."

Ophthalmologists at UAB Callahan Eye Hospital say that, if you use fireworks, follow these safety procedures to avoid injury, burns or blindness:

- Always use adult supervision. Never allow children to play with or ignite fireworks.
- Never try to re-light or pick up fireworks that have not ignited fully.
- Never use bottle rockets.
- Read and follow all manufacturers' warnings and instructions.
- Keep a source of water close by in case of fire or another mishap.
- Make sure fireworks are legal in your area before using them.
- Light fireworks one at a time, then move back quickly.
- Never throw fireworks at another person.
- Shoot fireworks on a clean, flat surface away from the house or flammable materials.

What to do for a fireworks eye injury

If an eye injury from [fireworks](#) occurs, remember:

- Seek medical attention immediately.
- Do not rub your eyes.
- Do not rinse your eyes.
- Do not apply pressure.
- Do not remove any objects that are stuck in the eye.
- Do not apply ointments or take any blood-thinning pain medications such as aspirin or ibuprofen.

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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