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**FEDERAL AGENCIES INVESTIGATE
SOFT CONTACT LENS USE, SOLUTION
AS CAUSE OF SERIOUS EYE FUNGUS**

AOA Urges Contact Lens Wearers to Take Proper Precautions

ST. LOUIS, MO – [APRIL 11, 2006] – Following warnings from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about increased reports of a serious eye fungus among Americans, doctors of optometry from the American Optometric Association's (AOA) Contact Lens and Cornea Section urge contact lens wearers to take proper precautions to prevent the potentially sight-threatening eye infection called *Fusarium* keratitis.

Bausch & Lomb voluntarily suspended shipment of a contact lens solution Monday after reports from federal health officials that *Fusarium* keratitis, a severe corneal fungal infection, has been potentially linked to their ReNu® with MoistureLoc® brand contact lens solution.

As of April 9, 2006, 109 cases of suspected *Fusarium* keratitis are under investigation by the CDC and public health authorities in 17 states around the United States. Federal and state health officials have interviewed 30 of those patients. Of the 28 who wore soft contact lenses, 26 reported using Bausch & Lomb's ReNu® brand or a generic brand manufactured by Bausch & Lomb.

AOA optometrists are taking an active role in reporting their cases to the CDC and the FDA, where all eye doctors are strongly urged to report diagnosed cases of *Fusarium* keratitis.

"Patients should be concerned but not alarmed, as the number of patients affected is still relatively small," said Arthur Epstein, O.D., chair of the Contact Lens and Cornea Section of the AOA and a nationally recognized expert on contact lens complications. "However this is a serious infection that can cause permanent loss of sight. Some patients have reported a significant loss of vision and have undergone corneal transplants. With recent increases in confirmed cases and cases being investigated, it is crucial that the public and eye care professionals are aware and remain vigilant to quickly diagnose and initiate treatment of this serious eye disease."

U.S. health officials say the investigation is still in the early stages; however, optometrists are cautioning contact lens wearers to be on alert after a recent similar outbreak of severe corneal infections in Asia. According to the CDC, in February, Bausch & Lomb voluntarily withdrew sales of its ReNu® contact lens solution in Singapore and Hong Kong after 39 cases were reported in Singapore.

"It is important that contact lens users seek proper medical attention immediately if they notice changes to their eyes or vision," said Dr. Epstein. Doctors of optometry urge anyone who experiences the following symptoms to contact their optometrist immediately:

- Sudden blurred or fuzzy vision
- Red and irritated eyes lasting for an unusually long period of time
- Pain in and around the eyes
- Increased sensitivity to light
- Excessive eye tearing

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In addition, regardless of which cleaning/disinfecting solution consumers use, contact lens wearers should take extra precautions with lens hygiene habits. According to the AOA, clean and safe handling of contact lenses is one of the most important measures Americans can take to protect their sight.

Top 6 Recommendations for Clean and Safe Contact Lenses

1. Always wash your hands before handling contact lenses.
2. Carefully and regularly clean contact lenses, as directed by your optometrist. If recommended, rub the contact lenses with fingers and rinse thoroughly before soaking lenses overnight in sufficient multi-purpose solution to completely cover the lens.
3. Store lenses in the proper lens storage case and replace the case every three months. Clean the case after each use, and keep it open and dry between cleanings.
4. Use only products recommended by your optometrist to clean and disinfect your lenses. Saline solution and rewetting drops are not designed to disinfect lenses.
5. Only fresh solution should be used to clean and store contact lenses. Never re-use old solution. Contact lens solution must be changed according to the manufacturer's recommendations, even if the lenses are not used daily.
6. Always replace old contacts when you get a new contact lens prescription.

When wearing or cleaning contacts:

- Never put contact lenses in the mouth or moisten them with saliva, which is full of bacteria and a potential source of infection.
- Don't use tap water or homemade saline solutions. Improper use of solutions has been linked to a potentially blinding condition among soft lens wearers.
- Never use contacts that have not been prescribed by an eye doctor. Contact lens wear is not an option for everyone; consult with an optometrist to see if contact lenses are an appropriate choice for vision correction.

More than 30 million Americans wear contact lenses, according to the Contact Lens Institute. More than 80 percent of contact lens wearers go to an optometrist for their eye care.

About the American Optometric Association (AOA):

The American Optometric Association represents more than 34,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists provide more than two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States and serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country. In 3,500 of those communities they are the only eye doctors.

American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

Prior to optometry school, optometrists undergo three to four years of undergraduate study that typically culminates in a bachelor's degree with extensive, required coursework in areas such as advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit www.aoa.org.