World Braille Day

Around 285 million people globally have impaired vision, but according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 80% of cases can be prevented or cured.

Every year on 4 January the world celebrates World Braille Day, an event to raise awareness of visual impairment and braille, a tactile writing system used by individuals with the condition.

There are various levels of visual function: normal vision, low vision (which encompasses moderate and severe visual impairment), and blindness.

People in developing countries and those aged over 50 are at greatest risk of visual impairment. In fact, 90% of people with impaired vision live in developing countries, while 65% of people aged over 50 experience vision problems.

According to WHO, the introduction of various government initiatives, such as increased accessibility and availability of eye care and global education programmes, has helped to significantly reduce preventable vision loss.

As individuals, we can protect our vision in various ways. It's widely accepted that sun exposure is an underlying cause of many eye problems. WHO estimates that 20% of cataracts – a leading cause of blindness – are "caused or enhanced by sun exposure".

Cataracts and other eye diseases like cancer can take years to develop, however, every time we expose our unprotected eyes to the sun, we are adding damage which increases our risk of these serious disorders.

So, to keep your eyes safe, here are some tips from the American Academy of Ophthalmology:

- Wear UV-blocking sunglasses and broad-brimmed hats whenever outside, even if it's not sunny and regardless of your age. Remember that UV rays can still pass through clouds and damage your eyes.
- Never look directly at the sun, as this can cause severe damage to the eye's retina.
- Take extra care in high-UV conditions. Sunlight is strongest from late morning to afternoon, at higher altitudes, and when reflected off water, ice, or snow.

World Braille Day is celebrated on the birthday of Louis Braille, the system's inventor. It helps to raise awareness around the challenges that people with impaired vision or blindness face and to encourage communities to create opportunities for them. Consider how you could get involved.

Awareness