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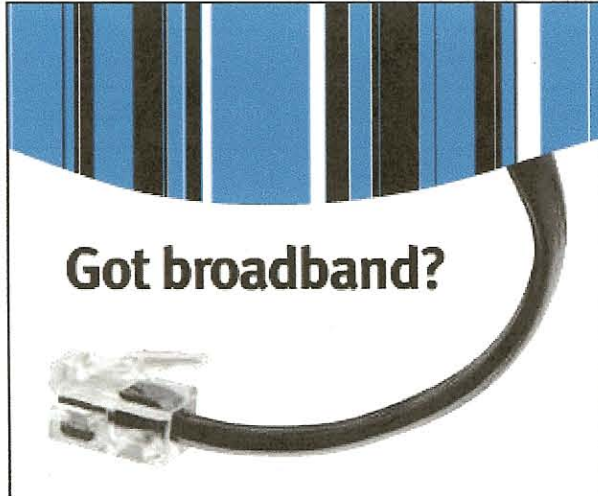
A better test for little eyes

Latest technology offers pediatricians an earlier, reliable way to screen young patients for vision problems.

By Cindy Stauffer
Lancaster New Era

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LANCASTER COUNTY, PA - Jordyn Zink sits, transfixed, on her mother's lap in her pediatrician's office.



Moments before, she was crying, upset from an immunization she had just received. Now, the 1-year-old East Hempfield Township tot snuffles but sits quietly.

On a screen in front of her, cartoon images of an elephant, parrot and other creatures appear. In between the creatures, black and white horizontal lines flash on the screen, growing smaller and

larger. Tinkly music, including "Oats, Peas, Beans and Barley Grow" and "Don't Catch that Fly," plays to keep Jordyn's attention.

The creatures, the lines, the music — all are part of a brand-new vision test for infants as young as 6 months.

Three electrodes attached to Jordyn's head feed information to a computer about what is happening along the nerve pathways that are sending signals about her vision to her brain.

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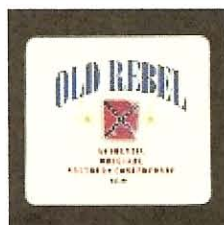
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Within a few minutes, her mother, Stephanie, gets the good news that her daughter passed the test, which detects vision problems such as optic nerve disorders and other conditions that could lead to

amblyopia or "lazy eye."

Amblyopia can lead to blindness in one eye. It's the most common cause of vision loss and is found in about 5 percent of children.

The test offers pediatricians an early, reliable way to detect vision problems and refer children to a pediatric ophthalmologist for further treatment, says Dr. Melissa Tribuzio, a pediatrician at Red Rose Pediatrics, a Lancaster practice offering the new test.

"This is the same technology that is being used in newborn hearing screenings in hospitals," Tribuzio says. "I think it will become much more common."

Pediatricians commonly screen young children's vision by looking into their eyes to check their retinas and corneal reflex, and also performing a test by covering and uncovering the eyes, to see if they wander.

"These are not great screening tests," Tribuzio says, noting they don't always detect problems.

With the new screening, called the Enfant Pediatric Vision Testing System, physicians get a more accurate test of the eye, she says.

Dr. David Silbert, a Lancaster pediatric ophthalmologist, says the new system "is an exciting new technology that's developed."

"It offers a way to pick up vision problems at a much earlier age, and I think that's a good thing," he said.

The new test is helpful because it's important to detect amblyopia early, Tribuzio says.

"During early childhood, you're forming those neural pathways from the eyes to the brain," she says.

If the brain does not get good "signals" along the nerve pathways, the brain essentially starts to ignore those signals, Tribuzio says. A weak eye then becomes weaker and eventually can go blind.

By the age of about 9, vision is fixed, so early detection is the key, she says.

Red Rose is the first practice in the area to offer the test, which takes about three to four minutes. The practice is screening children from the age of 6 months to 7 years old.

The test is covered by most insurance plans. If it is not covered, the fee is \$75.

Another vision screening tool for young children is available through the Susquehanna Association for the Blind.

Developed by a Lancaster businessman, the PhotoScreener is a high-tech camera that takes photos of a child's eyes. The images can reveal vision problems including amblyopia.

The Susquehanna Association for the Blind has a PhotoScreener and offers free vision screening for children ages 1 to 5 at local preschools and at its facility on North Queen Street.

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