

ENSURING SAFE CONTACT LENS PRACTICES IN PAKISTAN

Muhammad Anwar Awan, Sidra Anwar, Muhammad Shaheer

Contact lenses are becoming a popular choice in Pakistan, offering a convenient and stylish alternative to traditional eyeglasses. However, this surge in popularity has brought to light some serious issues regarding their use and advocacy. People often buy contact lenses from unlicensed vendors, without prescriptions, and without receiving proper instructions on their use and maintenance. The absence of thorough education on proper hygiene and care practices contributes to a growing number of complications.¹ Unregulated street vendors and unauthorized online sellers freely distribute contact lenses without any oversight. Malpractice in the contact lens industry in Pakistan has severe consequences for eye health.

A research conducted by Aimon U et al, concluded that major barriers to contact lens use among spectacle wearers were lack of interest (14.5%), lack of knowledge (13.5%), difficulty in insertion and removal (12.7%), and fear of side effects (9.5%).² The younger adults and those from urban areas were more likely to know about contact lenses. A survey by the Pakistan Medical Association revealed that 70% of contact lenses sold in unregulated markets did not meet safety standards.

There is a critical need for comprehensive public awareness campaigns to educate the population about the risks of improper contact lens use and the importance of purchasing lenses from licensed professionals. Optometrists and eye care professionals have a significant role in promoting safe contact lens practices. In a study conducted by Khan MH among healthcare professionals, only 24% knew the CL cleaning protocol. Lens solution was changed daily by 33% of users and after more than 2 weeks by 42%. Although 412 (82%) participants practiced reasonable hand hygiene before inserting CL, 88 (18%) did not.³ Optometrists should provide detailed instructions on lens care, hygiene, and the importance of regular eye check-ups.

Some might argue that regulating contact lens distribution would limit access and increase costs for consumers. However, the potential health risks and long-term costs associated with eye infections and vision loss far outweigh the benefits of easy access to cheap, unregulated lenses. Ensuring safety and quality should be a priority.

The situation of contact lens practice in Pakistan calls for immediate attention and action. It is imperative that the government, healthcare professionals, and the public work together to mitigate the risks associated with improper contact lens use and safeguard the eye health of the nation. By taking these measures, Pakistan can significantly reduce the incidence of contact lens-related complications and

ensure that individuals can enjoy the benefits of contact lenses without compromising their eye health.

References:

1. Stellwagen A, MacGregor C, Kung R, Konstantopoulos A, Hossain P. Personal hygiene risk factors for contact lens-related microbial keratitis. *BMJ Open Ophthalmol.* 2020;5(1):e000476.
2. Umm-e-Aiman, Sadiq M, Ayub F, Ali KN. Knowledge and barriers associated with contact lens use among spectacle wearers. *Khyber Med Uni J.* 2023;15(4):247-53. <https://dot.org/10.35845/kmuaj.2023.23338>.
3. Khan MH, Mubeen SM, Chaudhry TA, Khan SA. Contact lens use and its compliance for care among healthcare workers in Pakistan. *Indian J Ophthalmol.* 2013;61(7):334-7. DOI:10.4103/0301-4738.97552.