The California Department of Public Health’s Food and Drug Branch (CDPH FDB) is warning consumers about the health risks associated with the use of decorative contact lenses, also referred to as cosmetic, costume, or fashion contact lenses. If not dispensed or sold by prescription only, by licensed eye care professionals, contact lenses may not fit properly and cause severe eye damage when used.

Contact lenses are classified by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as medical devices and must be dispensed or sold by licensed eye care professionals by prescription only. The over-the-counter sale of contact lenses as cosmetics in salons, beauty supply stores, novelty stores, Halloween stores, convenience shops or on internet sites to consumers without a prescription is illegal, and these may be counterfeit devices that have not received FDA approval. Use of these contact lenses may result in severe harm to consumers.

CDPH FDB is calling attention to the following important considerations regarding contact lenses:

- Sale of contact lenses without a prescription is illegal even if they do not correct vision.
- Contact lenses are not “one size fits all.”
- Proper fit of contact lenses by a licensed eye care professional must be determined for each individual’s eyes.
- Poor-fitting contact lenses may cause infection and severe injury to eyes, resulting in itchiness or redness, eye pain, corneal scratches, corneal infections, poor vision, blindness or eye-loss (in severe cases).

Consumers are advised to consult their eye doctors if they are experiencing adverse health effects from the use of contact lenses. For more information on healthy contact lens wear and care as well as the dangers of decorative contact lens use, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s website or FDA’s website. For more information on what CDPH is doing to protect consumers from the dangers of decorative contact lenses watch this video. Consumers can report the illegal sale of decorative contact lenses without a prescription to CDPH’s Food and Drug Branch Hotline at (800) 495-3232 to initiate an investigation.

www.cdph.ca.gov