

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information:
Prevent Blindness
Sarah Hecker
Phone: (312) 363-6035
shecker@preventblindness.org

Prevent Blindness Study Estimates More than 8 Million Americans have Diabetic Retinopathy, Numbers Expected to Increase Significantly

***-Prevent Blindness Provides Free Educational Materials as Part of November's
Diabetic Eye Disease Awareness Month-***

CHICAGO (Oct. 20, 2016) – Today more than 8 million Americans have diabetic retinopathy, with that number expected to jump in the coming years, according to a study by [Prevent Blindness](#), the nation's oldest volunteer eye health and safety non-profit organization. The study, [The Future of Vision: Forecasting the Prevalence and Costs of Vision Problems](#), also projected extremely high growth in diabetic retinopathy cases for Hispanic populations. Currently, 67 percent of cases are among whites and 17 percent among Hispanics. By 2050, projections suggest that 45 percent of diabetic retinopathy patients will be white and 35 percent will be Hispanic. And, diabetic retinopathy affects more men than women.

Prevent Blindness has declared November as Diabetic Eye Disease Awareness Month to help educate the public on the effects of diabetes on vision, types of diabetic eye disease, risk factors and treatment options. Prevent Blindness offers a variety of free resources dedicated to the education of diabetic eye disease including its dedicated website, preventblindness.org/diabetes, and its free "Healthy Eyes Educational Series, Adult Vision Problems Module," at preventblindness.org/healthy-eyes-educational-series.

Diabetic eye disease is a group of eye conditions that affects people with diabetes including:

Diabetic retinopathy – A leading cause of blindness in American adults, it is caused by damage to the small blood vessels of the retina, the seeing layer of the eye. Retinal blood vessels can break down, leak, or become blocked, affecting oxygen and nutrient delivery to the retina, impairing vision over time. More damage to the retina can occur when abnormal new blood vessels grow on the surface of the retina and leak fluid or bleed. This can result in blurring of vision initially and in late stages, retinal detachment and/or glaucoma.

Diabetic macular edema (DME) – DME is a complication of diabetes caused by fluid accumulation in the macula that can affect the fovea. The macula is the central portion in the retina which is in the back of the eye and where vision is the sharpest. Vision loss

from DME can progress over a period of months and make it impossible to focus clearly.

Diabetic eye disease also includes cataract and glaucoma. Vision changes due to diabetic eye disease may include blurred vision, double vision, sudden increase in eye floaters, seeing halos around lights or flashing lights, and sudden loss of vision in one eye.

All those with diabetes are at risk of developing diabetic eye disease. To help prevent diabetic eye disease, Prevent Blindness suggests:

- Maintaining good blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol control.
- Getting a comprehensive dilated eye exam and/or obtaining retinal photographs that are examined by an eye doctor, at least once a year, or more often as recommended by the eye doctor.
- Pregnant women with diabetes prior to pregnancy should have a comprehensive dilated eye exam early in their pregnancy. The eye doctor may recommend additional exams during pregnancy.
- Keeping a healthy lifestyle that includes exercising regularly, not smoking and following a healthy diet. Talk to a dietician about eating habits and a doctor before starting an exercise program.

“It is imperative for anyone with diabetes to get an annual eye exam,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness. “Although there is no cure for diabetic eye disease today, vision loss can be lessened with early diagnosis and proper treatment from an eye care professional.”

[Medicare Part B \(Medical Insurance\)](#) covers a yearly eye exam for diabetic retinopathy by an eye doctor who is legally allowed to do the test in the state. All people with Part B who have diabetes are covered.

For more information on diabetic eye disease, the “Healthy Eyes Educational Series, Adult Vision Problems Module,” or other eye health information, please call Prevent Blindness at (800) 331-2020 or visit preventblindness.org/diabetes.

About Prevent Blindness

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening and training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, Prevent Blindness is committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call (800) 331-2020. Or, visit us on the Web at preventblindness.org or facebook.com/preventblindness.

###