

What should you tell parents about childhood cataract?

- Cataract can run in families, and more than one child in a family can be affected.
- Any parent or carer who notices a white spot in the child's eye(s) or who think that the child cannot see properly should take it seriously.
- All children with blindness and/or cataract should be referred to an eye doctor for detailed eye examination and diagnosis as soon as they are detected.
- Congenital cataract is treatable and surgery is the only treatment.
- Treatment of cataract for children is a matter of urgency, as early surgery increases the likelihood of better vision. The cataract does not need to mature. If the treatment is delayed there is a risk of amblyopia and irreversible visual impairment or blindness.
- After cataract surgery most children need to wear spectacles. This also applies to babies.
- Long-term follow up is essential to change the glasses and to manage any complications.

A child with a white spot where the pupil is normally black should be viewed as an emergency and referred to a hospital immediately.

For questions, please contact:

Kilimanjaro Center for Community Ophthalmology (KCCO)

Box 2254, Moshi, Tanzania.

Phone: +255 27 275 3547

Email: ekishiki@kcco.net

Website: www.kcco.net



Kilimanjaro Centre for
Community Ophthalmology

Surgery is free

At KCMC Hospital in Moshi cataract surgery for children is provided free of charge for children with non-injury related cataract. There is no fee for registration or surgery. The cost of surgery is being paid for by a grant to the KCCO from Dark and Light, Netherlands.

Childhood Cataract

A Guide for Health Workers



What is it?

What can be done to help children with cataract?

How can you help?

Why don't parents bring their children for surgery?

- Many parents are not aware that surgery is the only treatment for childhood cataract.
- Parents often prefer non-invasive treatments (including traditional remedies) to surgical treatment.
- Parents think that the white spot is temporary and will go away by itself.
- Fear that surgery in young children will be dangerous.
- Fear of cutting such a small eye or that the surgeon will remove the eye.
- Fear of removing the lens (cataract) from the child's eye and putting the plastic lens inside the child's eye.
- Fear of traveling to the big city just to visit the eye hospital.
- Cost of traveling and accommodation for 2-3 family members and fees for consultation, investigation, surgery, post operative medication and spectacles.

What will happen if a child needs surgery?

Cataract can only be treated by surgery, there is no other treatment. The surgery must be done in a hospital with an eye surgeon specially trained to operate on children. The cloudy lens will be removed and often a small plastic lens (an IOL) will be inserted into the eye. The child will be in a hospital for 1-2 weeks so that careful follow-up can be done after surgery.

Almost all children need to wear glasses after surgery. If the doctor prescribes glasses, then the child **MUST** wear glasses all the time after surgery or else the child will not see properly. The glasses must be properly fit and they must be checked often:

- Every 3 months for children less than 2 years old,
- Every 6 months for children 2 –5 years old, and
- Every one year for children older than 5 years.

The glasses will have to be adjusted as the child grows. Eye drops will have to be used for 2 – 3 months after surgery. It is important to come for regular eye check-ups after surgery.

Children living in Kilimanjaro, Arusha, Singida, Manyara, Shinyanga, Mwanza, Mara, and northern Tanga should go to KCMC Hospital in Moshi.

Should all cataracts in children be operated on?

Children who have cataract in both eyes almost always need an operation. If a child has a cataract in only one eye, then the decision to operate will depend on how long the cataract has been present. The doctor will have to decide how good are the chances of improving the vision by surgery.

Is it safe to do surgery on a baby?

It is safe to do cataract surgery even with a baby of 2 months old. The longer you wait to do surgery, the worse is the chance that the outcome will be good. The presence of cataract keeps the eye from developing normally. If you wait, the child may never develop good vision after surgery.

What should you do if you suspect that a child has a cataract?

This is an emergency. Educate the family that they need to see an eye specialist as soon as possible.

If the child has a cataract and gets surgery, help the parents to understand the importance of follow-up, using spectacles and low vision aids.