

**What should you tell  
parents about childhood  
cataract?**

1. Cataract can run in families, and more than one child in a family can be affected.
2. 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.
3. All children with blindness and/or cataract should be referred to an eye doctor for detailed eye examination immediately.
4. Congenital cataract is treatable and surgery is the only treatment.
5. Treatment for cataract in 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.
6. After cataract surgery most children need to wear spectacles. This also applies to babies.
7. Long-term follow up is essential (unlike cataract surgery in adults) to monitor the vision, to change the glasses and to manage complications.

**For questions:**

**Please contact:**

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**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**

**What is it?**

**What can be done to help children  
with cataract?**

**How can you help?**



**Occasionally children are  
born with cataract, or  
develop cataract in  
childhood**

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

## 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 medical treatment or 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 on 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
- Financial barriers
  - ❖ Cost of traveling and accommodation for 2-3 family members
  - ❖ 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 tertiary 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 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, & northern Tanga should go to KCMC Hospital, 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 the eye specialists soon as possible. Refer the family to the district eye hospital or other hospital with eye care service.

Record information on the child's family (name, age, residence) or ask someone to follow up with the family and counsel the family

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.