



# DAVIDSON COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Protecting, Caring, Serving Our County

Lillian Koontz, MPA, REHS  
HEALTH DIRECTOR

Rebecca Daley, RN, MHA  
CHAIR, BOARD OF HEALTH

Michael Garrison, MD  
MEDICAL DIRECTOR

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## THE PUBLIC PULSE “Your Health Department Working For You”

**Contact: Jen Hames**  
**336-242-2354**

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### JANUARY IS NATIONAL GLAUCOMA AWARENESS MONTH

Glaucoma is a disease of the eyes in which damage to the optic nerve leads to progressive, irreversible vision loss. Glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness. There are more than 3 million people in the United States and 60 million people worldwide that have glaucoma. The disease has no symptoms and once vision is lost, it is a permanent loss. A person can lose as much as 40% of their vision without noticing.

Although the disease can affect people of all ages, glaucoma is found mainly in the middle-aged and the elderly. By 2030, the National Eye Institute projects a 58% increase in Americans who will suffer from glaucoma. Although everyone is at risk for glaucoma, there are certain groups of people who are at higher risk than other groups. This includes:

- African Americans
- People over 60
- Older Hispanics
- Asians
- Steroid Users
- Individuals who have endured an eye injury

Other possible risk factors include:

- Nearsightedness
- Hypertension
- Central corneal thickness less than .5mm

There are many steps you can take to help protect your eyes and lower your risk of vision loss from glaucoma:

- If you are in a high-risk group, get a comprehensive dilated eye exam to catch glaucoma early and start treatment. Prescription eye drops can stop glaucoma from progressing. Your eye care specialist will recommend how often to return for follow-up exams. Medicare covers a glaucoma test once a year for people in high-risk groups.
- Even if you are not in a high-risk group, getting a comprehensive dilated eye exam by the age of 40 can help catch glaucoma and other eye diseases early.
- Open-angle glaucoma does not have symptoms and is hereditary, so talk to your family members about their vision health to help protect your eyes - and theirs.
- Maintaining a healthy weight, controlling your blood pressure, being physically active, and avoiding smoking will help you avoid vision loss from glaucoma. These healthy behaviors will also help prevent type 2 diabetes and other chronic conditions.

There is no cure for glaucoma. However, medication or surgery can slow or prevent further vision loss. Effective treatment depends on the type of glaucoma, along with other factors. The Glaucoma Research Foundation is a national non-profit organization funding innovative research to preserve vision and find a cure for glaucoma. For more information, visit [www.glaucoma.org](http://www.glaucoma.org).

For more information about health department services, community data, or health status data, contact the Public Information Officer at the Davidson County Health Department at (336) 242-2354.