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To help curb vision loss among at-risk communities, the American Academy of Ophthalmology is reminding African-Americans about race-related risk factors for eye disease during National Minority Health Month in April. African-Americans are more than twice as likely to develop diabetic retinopathy compared to Caucasians and are four times more likely than Caucasians to go blind from glaucoma. African-Americans also face a greater risk for cataracts.

Additionally, because most serious eye diseases are age-related, African-American seniors are at especially high risk for eye diseases and blindness as they age. Because of these risk factors, ophthalmologists – medical doctors who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of eye diseases – encourage all seniors with race-related risk factors to get a comprehensive, dilated eye exam to detect problems early and prevent vision loss.

Seniors of all ethnicities may qualify for care through EyeCare America, a public service program of the Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. EyeCare America offers eye exams and up to one year of care at no out-of-pocket cost to qualifying seniors age 65 and older. Eligible patients are matched with an ophthalmologist in their area to provide this care.

"The first line of defense against eye disease is to get an eye exam and find out if there's a problem," said Richard P. Mills, M.D., chairman of EyeCare America. "It is our goal to ensure that the cost of medical care never stops someone from getting a sight-saving eye exam."

Most eye diseases have no early symptoms, so the only way to detect them before vision is permanently damaged is through a dilated eye exam. The exam may uncover early signs of eye disease, like abnormal blood vessel growth or pupil responses, damage to the retina or optic nerve, and vision loss. The following symptoms may indicate that an eye disease has advanced:

- Vision loss
- Blank spots or dark areas in your vision
- Blurred vision
- Double vision
- Poor night vision
- Faded colors
- Sensitivity to light
- Eye pain

If you or someone you know experience any of these symptoms, contact an ophthalmologist immediately. To see if you or a loved one age 65 and older qualifies for care through EyeCare America, visit [www.eyecareamerica.org](http://www.eyecareamerica.org).