

# Theatrical Contact Lenses

## ACTSAFE SAFETY BULLETIN #46

This bulletin provides guidelines for safely using theatrical contact lenses in motion picture and television productions. Even though prescription contact lenses are safely used by many people in daily life, there can be risks with using any type of lenses. A qualified contact lens technician will help prevent eye injuries by ensuring that theatrical lenses are fitted and used correctly.

### WHAT ARE THEATRICAL CONTACT LENSES?

Theatrical contact lenses are sometimes referred to as prosthetic, cosmetic, costume, character, or decorative lenses. They are often worn by performers to create a unique look or effect for filming purposes. The lenses can be tinted, have fixed pupil sizes, be thicker or larger in diameter than normal prescription contact lenses, or be weighted to help prevent them from spinning in

the performer's eyes (e.g., cats-eye lenses with slits that need to stay vertical).

Theatrical contact lenses are classified as medical devices in Canada and must be licensed and labelled according to Canada's [Medical Devices Regulations](#). Only lenses that meet these standards should be provided for performers.

### CONTACT LENS TECHNICIANS

Contact lens technicians are licensed opticians, optometrists, or ophthalmologists who are hired to manage contact lenses on sets. They are trained to assess conditions associated with wearing contact

lenses, recognize potential risks, and do lens fittings. If theatrical contact lenses are being used, the lens tech should insert, remove, and maintain them. No one other than the lens tech should handle the lenses.

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Many performers have never used contact lenses and may not know how they should normally feel. Here are some signs and symptoms of eye irritation or infection:

- Discomfort, stinging, burning, itching, grittiness, or other eye pain
- Excessive tearing or unusual eye secretions
- Redness or swelling

- Blurred vision
- Rainbows or halos around objects
- Sensitivity to light or dry eyes

If performers experience any of these signs or symptoms, they should immediately report to the lens tech to have the contact lenses removed. If signs or symptoms persist, the performer should also report to first aid to document the issue.

### HAZARDS

Wearing any type of contact lenses presents risks of developing conditions such as eye irritation, infections, allergic reactions, corneal abrasions, or corneal ulcers. These conditions can develop quickly and be serious. Theatrical lenses that haven't been approved by Health Canada can be especially dangerous and can even lead to blindness.

#### Reduced vision

Some theatrical lenses may reduce the wearer's peripheral or overall vision to a point where they may need a guide. For example, a performer walking from a bright area to a dark set may have difficulty seeing if their pupil dilation is restricted



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by the fixed pupil size of the theatrical lens. If there is no pupil opening in the contact lens (i.e., cataract lenses or “blind” lenses), vision can be

hazy or reduced to just shapes of light and dark. The performer may need accommodations such as auditory cues when filming.

## CONTROL MEASURES

### Lens fittings

There should be a contact lens fitting before shooting to ensure that the performer can use them safely. The fitting may be on the shoot day, but for specific needs such as prescription lenses it may need to take place earlier.

The lens tech doing the fitting should consider pre-existing conditions or allergies when making recommendations about the wearability of a contact lens.

### General guidelines

- Remove lenses when performers are off camera for extended periods.
- Remove lenses if the performer is working with or around hazardous substances.

- Schedule shoots so performers don't have to wear contact lenses for days in a row, which can increase the risk of eye irritation and injuries.
- Consider the effects of wind machines, simulated snow storms, atmospheric smoke, and dust or other particulate matter.
- If contact lenses are going to be reused by a different performer, they must be professionally sterilized first (e.g., using an autoclave).
- Train performers and the makeup department on the signs and symptoms of eye irritation.
- Follow the lens tech's guidelines for inspection, maintenance, storage, hygiene, application, and management of contact lenses.

## RELATED RESOURCES

- [Contact Lenses at Work](#) (CCOHS)
- [2018-2019 Compliance Monitoring Project \(CMP\) on Decorative Contact Lenses](#) (Government of Canada)
- [Notice: Decorative Contact Lenses](#) (Government of Canada)
- [Medical Devices Active Licence Listing \(MDALL\)](#) (Government of Canada)

### Actsafes Safety Association

Actsafes ([www.actsafe.ca](http://www.actsafe.ca)) is a not-for-profit health and safety association supporting British Columbia's arts and entertainment industries. Actsafes provides resources and training to employers, workers, and supervisors. We are always here to provide information relevant to best practices around health and safety in the arts and entertainment industries in B.C.

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