

NYSTAGMUS NETWORK (UK) NETLETTER

October 2006

How Common Is Nystagmus?

That's an FAQ which we can't answer as well as we'd like to, because we don't yet have enough information. Our best estimate is somewhere between 1 in 1,000 and 1 in 2,000 based on feedback from medics and scientists. Certainly, some research into the prevalence of nystagmus currently underway in Leicester in the UK supports those figures.

Straw polls

Our own occasional straw polls of teachers working with visually impaired children are hardly scientific, but they do show consistent results. In many parts of the UK, around half or more of children who are assigned a specialist VI teacher have nystagmus.

Paul White, our Information and Development Manager, confirmed our previous findings by asking VI teachers at this year's Sight Village exhibition in Birmingham: "How many of the children/young people you work with have nystagmus?" The answers were as follows:

Northampton	an estimated 50%
Rotherham	4 out of 11 children
Denbighshire	over 50%
Birmingham	above 50%
Flintshire	a quarter of 70 children in one teacher's workload
Gloucester	40 out of 85
Stoke	4 out of 6
Staffordshire	20 out of 35
Sandwell	at least 25%
Derby City	half of 46 children have primary or secondary nystagmus
Derbyshire County Council	50% of 290 children and younger adults with nystagmus

Cause for concern

If anything, in some cases, the numbers may be under-reported. As one teacher noted, where a child's nystagmus is secondary to another eye condition, it may not show on the pupil database.

This is disturbing, since if teachers are not aware that a child has nystagmus they are less likely to provide the support necessary to compensate for the condition. As a result, typical nystagmus features such as a null point and slowness to see might not receive the attention they deserve.

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NFB Youth Slam

In the summer of 2007, the most exciting gathering of blind youth ever will come together to give voice to a new generation of blind leaders and explorers.

The NFB Youth Slam will forever change the perception that challenging careers are not available to the blind. Working under blind mentors, the youth will not only have the opportunity to engage in science activities but also attend workshops on a variety of topics and have fun during social events.

If you know of anyone who would be interested in being a participant in this once-in-a-lifetime event, applications for mentors and students are now posted on the National Center for Blind Youth in Science Web portal (www.blindscience.org). The direct link to the Youth Slam page is http://www.blindscience.org/ncbys/Youth_Slam.asp.

If you have any questions, please email youthslam@nfb.org.

If you would like to speak with someone regarding the application process, please call Rosy Carranza at (410) 659-9314, ext. 2283. To speak with someone about any other questions regarding the Youth Slam, please call Mark Riccobono at (410) 659-9314, ext. 2368.

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Contributions

Please send contributions, ideas or links for the NetLetter to Gill Taylor at gill@taylors.uk.com.