

Health & Science

LED light can damage eye's retina, disturb sleep health, authority warns

MAISONS-ALFORT: The "blue light" in LED lighting can damage the eye's retina and disturb natural sleep rhythms, France's government-run health watchdog said this week. New findings confirm earlier concerns that "exposure to an intense and powerful [LED] light is 'photo-toxic' and can lead to irreversible loss of retinal cells and diminished sharpness of vision," the French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety (ANSES) warned in a statement.

The agency recommended in a 400-page report that the maximum limit for acute exposure be revised, even if such levels are rarely met in home or work environments. The report distinguished between acute exposure of high-intensity LED light, and "chronic exposure" to lower intensity sources.

While less dangerous, even chronic exposure can "accelerate the ageing of retinal tissue, contributing to a decline in visual acuity and certain degenerative diseases such as age-related macular degeneration," the agency concluded.

Long-lasting, energy efficient and inexpensive, light-emitting diode (LED) technology has gobbled up half of the general lighting market in a decade, and will top 60 percent by the end of next year, according to industry projections. LED uses only a fifth of the electricity needed for an incandescent bulb of comparable brightness. The world's leading LED light-bulb makers are GE Lighting, Osram and Philips. The basic technology for producing a white light combines a short wavelength LED such as blue or ultraviolet with a yellow phosphor coating. The whiter or "colder" the light, the greater the proportion of blue in the spectrum.

LEDs are used for home and street lighting, as well as in offices and industry. That are also increasingly found in auto headlights, torches (flashlights) and some toys. LED cellphone, tablet and laptop screens do not pose a risk of eye damage because their luminosity is very low compared to other types of lighting, Francine Behar-Cohen, an ophthalmologist and head of the expert group that conducted the review, told journalists.

Circadian rhythm
But these back-lit devices — especially when they are used at night or in a dark setting — can "disturb biological rhythms, and thus sleep patterns," the agency cautioned. Because the crystalline lens in their eyes are not fully formed, children and adolescents are particularly susceptible to such disruptions, the ANSES reports noted. Interfering with the body's circadian rhythm is also known to aggravate metabolic disorders such as diabetes, as well as cardiovascular disease and some forms of cancer, noted Dina Attia, a researcher and project manager at ANSES.

In addition, a stroboscopic affect in some LED lights — provoked by tiny fluctuations in electric current — can induce "headaches, visual fatigue and a higher risk of accidents," the report said. For domestic lighting, ANSES recommended buying "warm white" LED lighting, limiting exposure to LED sources with a high concentration of blue light, and avoiding LED screens before bedtime. ANSES also said that manufacturers should "limit the luminous intensity of vehicle headlights," some of which are too bright. Finally, the agency cast doubt on the efficacy of some "anti-blue light" filters and sunglasses. — AFP

'Extreme drought' in N Korea: KCNA

SEOUL: North Korea's average rain and snowfall this year fell to the lowest level in 37 years, Pyongyang's state media said yesterday, just days after the UN expressed "grave concerns" about food shortages. The isolated, impoverished nation—which is under several sets of sanctions over its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile programs—has long struggled to feed itself and suffers chronic food shortages. A number of international organizations, including the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), have said minor disasters, including drought, can significantly worsen and hamper food production in the country.

From January to early May this year, North Korea only received 54.4 millimeters of rain or snow, the smallest amount since the same period in 1982, the state-run KCNA said, describing the

situation as "an extreme drought". Last month, the WFP and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization said in a joint report that North Korea's crop output last year hit the lowest level since 2008, and that an estimated 10 million people — 40 percent of the entire population—are in urgent need of food. "The situation could further deteriorate during the lean season from May to September, if no proper and urgent humanitarian actions are taken," the report said.

The WFP executive director David Beasley was in Seoul earlier this week, and said he is "very concerned" about food situation in the North during his meeting with the South Korean Unification Minister Kim Yeon-chul. A Unification Ministry official said Tuesday it is "necessary" to send food aid to the North sometime between May and September as recommended by the WFP report. Seoul in 2017 had aimed to send \$4.5 million worth of nutritional products to North Korea through the WFP, but that never happened partially due to Pyongyang's nuclear tests that year. The South's presidential Blue House has said US President Donald Trump supports Seoul's plan to provide humanitarian food aid to the North. — AFP

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