Childhood hearing, vision screenings identify potential problems

By Lt. Anne Jarrett, U.S. Naval Hospital Yokosuka

Each year, U.S. Naval Hospital (USNH) Yokosuka supports area Department of Defense schools by providing hearing and vision screenings to children at schools in Yokosuka, Negishi and Ikego. Because vision and hearing are the primary senses used to learn, it is essential that children are screened to identify potential problems. Without screening, children often do not complain or voice concern. With a screening, children who need further evaluation to determine if medical care is needed can be identified and the educational impact on a child with hearing or vision problems can be lessened.

Many vision and hearing problems developed in childhood, and, if not caught in time, can have life-long consequences. Amblyopia, also known as "lazy eye," is one example. If a lazy eye is allowed to fully develop, 20/20 vision may not ever be achieved in one or both eyes. A child with undetected hearing loss can suffer a number of challenges when trying to operate in a world geared toward children who do not have hearing problems. They have trouble understanding speech and become more fatigued in the classroom because of the greater effort it takes for them to listen. They can appear inattentive or frustrated and sometimes behavioral problems can occur. Hearing loss can also impact children socially when subtle conversational cues are not heard, causing them to answer inappropriately to teachers, families and peers. Additionally, hearing loss can impact speech because the child's own feedback system to monitor and correct speech is not working. Clearly, hearing loss can impact all learning environments that require hearing.

Treatment for vision problems may be as simple as a prescription for glasses for full-time wear. Other times patching the good eye to force the child to use an underdeveloped eye can help. For some conditions, such as an eye turn, surgery may be an option. Treatment for hearing loss can vary, depending on whether the cause of the hearing problem is permanent or temporary. Temporary hearing loss is often treated with medications or surgery. Permanent hearing loss may be treated with hearing aids, assistive listening devices and special education modifications and services. If vision or hearing difficulties are caught and addressed early, the less likely it is that a child will suffer any insurmountable educational setbacks.

Some symptoms a child with vision problems may display are squinting, an eye turning in or out, headaches or eyestrain while reading or trouble focusing. Signs of hearing loss can vary depending on the degree of hearing loss and if it is in one or both ears. When hearing loss is present, children usually use other senses, such as sight or touch, to help fill in the blanks. Often a child with hearing loss can go undetected for months and even years, and this is why screening and follow-up is vital. Mild hearing losses are easy to miss unless there are sudden changes or complaints of ear pain.

USNH Yokosuka Audiology staff conduct hearing screenings on students as part of hearing and vision screenings at area Department of Defense schools. Because vision and hearing are the primary senses used to learn, it is essential that children are screened to identify potential problems.

Photo courtesy of USNH Yokosuka Public Affairs

During this year's school hearing and vision screenings, which took place in September and October, USNH Yokosuka medical staff saw more than 1,000 children. Parents were given the results with recommendations for follow up. If a child failed the screening, follow-ups need to continue until the child is retested and cleared.

Contact the USNH Yokosuka Audiology Department at 243-2606 or 046-816-2606 or the USNH Yokosuka Optometry Department at 243-5371 or 046-816-5371 for more information about hearing and vision screenings.

Holiday season traffic safety awareness

By Adrian Marsh,
CFAY Traffic Safety Office

As we gear up to enjoy the holiday season, the Traffic Safety Division would like to remind everyone of a few safe driving tips.

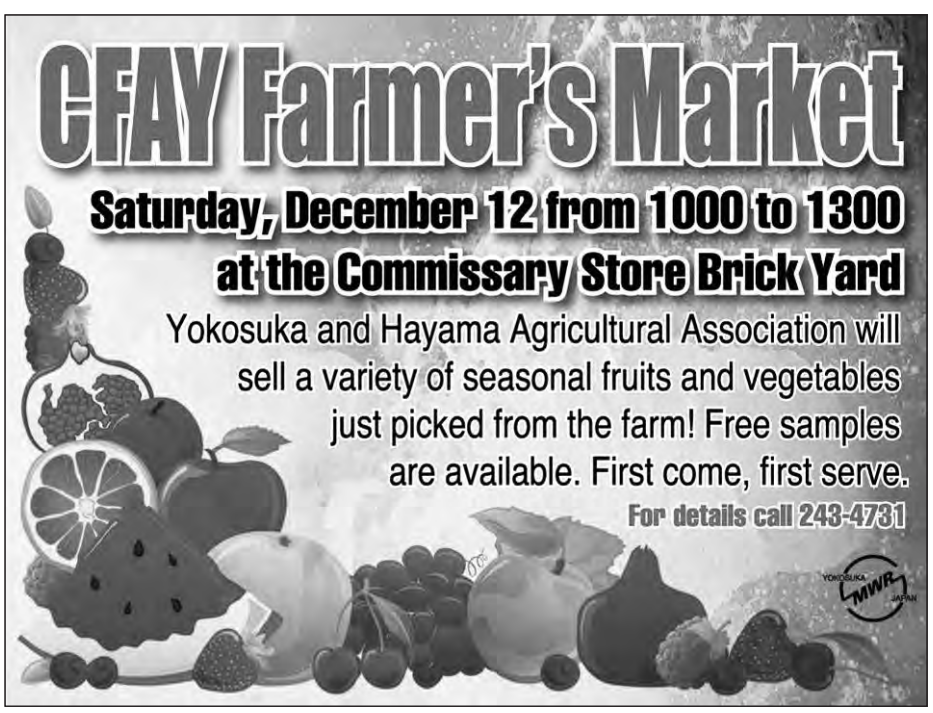
Plan your trips to avoid looking at maps, rushing to make appointments or trying to get that open parking space closest to the entrance. Reduce your speed and increase your following distance. With the earlier hours of darkness, and the possibility of reduced visibility due to inclement weather, be aware of pedestrians, bicyclists, motorcycles and mopeds sharing the roadways. Remember; be extra cautious when driving to and from you destinations.

Make sure your vehicle is mechanically ready to endure the colder temperatures and wet or icy road conditions. Have your battery tested for cold weather starting amperage, replace worn tires, wipers and burned out bulbs. Keep your windows free of ice, snow, dirt and other debris. Make sure you do not block your view with packages or other items you may have placed in the back seat or cargo areas. Keep an emergency survival kit stored in your vehicle and try to always keep your gas tank at least half full. Ensure your spare tire is in good condition and that you know how to properly start a vehicle using jumper cables. Know how to contact emergency response personnel in case you are involved in an accident. Keep emergency numbers saved in your cell phone. Never talk (including a hands-free device) or text on a cell phone or use any other in-ear listening device while driving.

For those who plan to go back to the United States to visit family and friends, make sure you have a plan and stick to that plan. Let your relatives know what your travel plans are and the expected time of arrival. Remember that you have been driving on the left side of the road here in Japan and it may take time for you to revert to driving on the right hand side of the road again. Get plenty of rest before driving for long periods of time. Ensure that you take frequent breaks or if traveling with others, change drivers from time to time. Driving while fatigued is just as dangerous as driving while intoxicated.

If you do plan to drive while visiting outside of Japan, it is highly recommended you use the Travel Risk Planning System (TRiPS). This is a great tool to assess your overall driving risks and will provide you ways to reduce those risks. You can access TRiPS through the Navy Knowledge On-line (NKO) Web site.

Holiday energy saving tips

The following are a few tips to help you save money and energy during the holiday season:

- **Switch to LED Christmas lights.**
- **Use fiber optic decorations.**
- **Limit the time lights are on.**
- **Turn off room lights when the tree is lit.**
- **Turn the thermostat down slightly when entertaining guests.**
- **Buy gifts that don't use electricity or batteries.**
- **Invest in rechargeable batteries and a charger.**
- **Buy energy star certified electronics.**
- **Use the smallest appliance to get the job done.**
- **Unplug phantom energy users before you go on vacation.**