

Children's Eye Health Coalition
Response statement on the Child Safety Online Expert Panel Report
22 July 2026

The [Children's Eye Health Coalition](#) is concerned by a statement made in the [Child Safety Online: Protecting and Empowering Minors in a Digital World report](#), published on 13 July 2026 and developed by the European Commission Expert Panel on protecting and empowering minors in a digital world.

The report states that “there is no strong evidence” linking overall screen time to the development of myopia. **The Coalition contests this claim and highlights that it is not supported by the scientific literature nor by the very sources the panel cites.** This clarification is therefore issued to ensure that EU guidance on children's digital environments accurately reflects the current evidence base on screen exposure and myopia risk.

Screen exposure is a recognised part of the myopia risk environment

A large body of research shows a **clear and consistent association** between increased near-work activities – including screen use – and higher rates of myopia in children. The evidence demonstrates that excessive screen exposure forms part of the risk environment for myopia development, with comprehensive studies showing that **children spending more than three hours per day on digital devices have over 25% higher risk of developing myopia, rising to over 75% when computer use is included**,¹ and that myopia risk increases sharply between one and four hours of daily screen exposure.²

The sources cited by the Expert Panel's report do not support the claim that “no strong evidence exists.” [One](#) directly states that “*either in childhood or in adolescence, a high use of screen devices is associated with the risk of developing myopia*”,³ while [another](#) presents a more nuanced picture, noting mixed scientific perspectives and highlighting evidence that “*heightened usage of electronic devices [during the COVID-19 pandemic] had a significant impact on the progression of myopia*”.⁴ **Both sources explicitly recognise screen exposure as part of the myopia risk environment.**

While researchers continue to examine the relative contribution of direct causation versus indirect pathways (e.g., reduced outdoor time), **the scientific debate consistently confirms a strong correlation between screen use, near-work intensity and myopia, and recent evidence points toward more direct links between screen exposure and myopia.**

Protecting children online requires integrating visual health into the digital safety agenda

The Coalition therefore encourages the Commission to frame future guidance in a way that:

- **Acknowledges the robust scientific consensus on the association between screen / near work and myopia**, while exact causal mechanisms are still being studied, and
- **Emphasises pragmatic risk reduction measures**: more outdoor time, limits on prolonged near work, breaks during screen use, and regular high-quality eye examinations for children.

This approach would align EU guidance with the best available evidence while supporting parents, educators and policymakers in promoting healthier digital habits.

The Coalition strongly supports the European Commission's broader agenda on protecting minors online, including age-appropriate design, phased access to social media, and reducing harmful digital exposure. These measures complement efforts to address the physical and visual health impacts of digital environments. We stand ready to work with the Commission, Member States and civil society partners to ensure that children's eye health is fully integrated into Europe's digital safety framework.

About the Children's Eye Health Coalition

The Children's Eye Health Coalition brings together organisations across eye health, education, sport, youth development and digital well-being to address the rising challenge of childhood myopia and the broader impacts of digital environments on children. The coalition published a jointly endorsed [Joint Policy Statement on Children's Eye Health](#) in April 2025, setting out shared priorities on prevention, early intervention, outdoor time, healthy learning environments and responsible digital exposure. It continues to collaborate on awareness-raising, policy engagement and cross-sector action to support children's visual health across Europe.

¹ Foreman, J. et al. (2021). [Association between digital smart device use and myopia: a systematic review and meta-analysis.](#)

² Ha. A. et al. (2025). [Digital Screen Time and Myopia: A Systematic Review and Dose-Response Meta-Analysis.](#)

³ Bozzola, E. et al. (2024). [Media Device Use and Vision Disorders in the Pediatric Age: The State of the Art.](#)

⁴ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2024). [Myopia: Causes, Prevention, and Treatment of an Increasingly Common Disease.](#)