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Laser pointer retinopathy

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Purpose: Clinical description of laser pointer retinopathy.

Methods: Retinal burns leading to acute visual loss were documented by fundus photos and angiography in three eyes of two patients.

Case Reports: A student competing with his friends to stare longer at a laser pointer resulted in bilateral retinal burns (final VA 20/100 and 20/40). Another student developed a foveal burn in his right eye (final VA was 20/40). This was a result of staring at a 5mW laser pointer.

Conclusion: Laser pointers can result in serious retinal damage, especially long exposure to powerful ones. Laser pointers are useful presentation aids. Recently laser pointers have been misused to distract people and drivers. The beam of a powerful laser pointer can be a hundred times more powerful than the brightest sunlight. The classification of lasers differs in Europe and in the USA. Under European standards a 5mW laser key chain is classed 3B where it is considered in the USA as class 3A. It is known that class 3B can deliver power up to 500mW. Laser pointers are considered safe and cause dazzling if viewed momentarily. Nevertheless retinal photocoagulation can occur with exposure to class 3A laser for more than 10 seconds. Malingers may present with visual problems after exposure to a laser pointer, a problem that has been encountered worldwide. We report 3 eyes with photocoagulation from misuse of laser pointers.

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