

Headline: LED street lights can damage eyes and cause sleep problems, health officials warn

Outlet: Global News Calgary

Date: April 4, 2018

Byline: Maham Abedi

Link: <https://globalnews.ca/news/4122605/led-street-lights-eyesight-health-effects/>

LED street lights are proven to be cheaper for cities, and more environmentally friendly, but health officials in Britain are warning that they also could have adverse health effects on travellers.

[Public Health England warned this week](#) that the street lights can disrupt sleep, resulting in a “permanent jet lag.” The blue colour of the lights can also result in damage to the retina.

It added that the “uncomfortable” effects of the lights are especially pronounced in the elderly, or those with preexisting eye conditions.

This isn’t the first time concerns have been raised over LED street lights. [A similar warning](#) was issued by the Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) in May 2017.

“Many streets and roadways in Canada are changing their approach to lighting,” the release read.

It added that while policymakers shouldn’t ignore the lights’ benefits, they should give more thought to adverse health effects.

“Canadian Association of Optometrists recommends they should also attempt to choose lighting and lighting distribution that reduces light pollution and glare.”

Health effects of LED lights

Ottawa-based optometrist Dr. Kirsten North explained to Global News that the blue light found in LED bulbs can damage retina cells and cause cataracts to develop sooner. But she explained exactly how damaging LED street lights are in particular has not been determined.

“It makes sense that some damage will happen,” North said.

The [American Medical Association](#) (AMA) provides more information on how exactly the lights can harm travelers.

“Despite the energy efficiency benefits, some LED lights are harmful when used as street lighting,” its website reads.

It explains that while the lights appear white to the human eye, they are actually blue, which can make nighttime glares more harsh for eyes, and can lead to discomfort.

Because the lights are so bright, they can also suppress melatonin at night, making it harder to fall asleep or lowering sleep quality.

The medical association recommended that all LED street lights be used with proper coverings, and be dimmed during off-peak hours.

LED Street lights in Canada

Street lighting decisions in Canada are generally up to cities, and several have installed more LED fixtures.

In 2016, [Surrey, B.C.](#), took on a five-year plan to replace about 28,000 high pressure sodium lights with LED. The city addressed concerns raised over the lights' health implications in a May 2016 report, saying that "considerable research" has been done on how they impact humans and wildlife.

The report explained that engineers opted for a lighting colour similar to the moon, which lowers negative impact of the blue hue.

"This colour temperature avoids the blue-rich light that potentially disrupts wildlife and human sleeping/eating/exercising patterns," the report read.

Several other cities in Canada, including Toronto, [Saskatoon and Regina](#), have also installed LED lights.