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Fungus shows up in soft-lens wearers

THE HELP TEAM HEALTH ALERT

BY BOB LAMENDOLA HEALTH WRITER

In an outbreak that so far has puzzled health officials, a potentially damaging fungus is infecting the eyes of a small but growing number of people in South Florida and elsewhere who wear soft contact lenses, Miami researchers said Wednesday.

The fusarium fungus typically strikes soft-lens wearers only rarely, but a dozen in South Florida have been infected since January in the biggest reported outbreak in the country, a chief at the University of Miami's Bascom Palmer Eye Institute said.

Federal health officials are working with local officials to investigate outbreaks here and in other states.

"We have no idea why this is happening to contact lens wearers," said Dr. Eduardo C. Alfonso, an eye surgeon and chairman of ophthalmology at Bascom Palmer. "I'm getting phone calls almost every hour from people around the country seeing infections among people wearing contact lenses."

■ EYES CONTINUES ON 4A

Facts on fusarium

A small but growing outbreak of eye fungus — fusarium — has afflicted a small number of South Floridians who wear soft contact lenses in recent months.

How it spreads: The fungus, common on plants and soil in tropical areas, infects the eye by entering a damaged or weak spot on the cornea. Soft contact lenses may be more likely to cause damage spots.

Who's affected: Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami identified 21 cases in South Florida this year, 12 among soft-lens wearers. Typically, the average is 21 per year, the vast majority in people with eye trauma and only a tiny number of lens wearers.

Symptoms: Blurred vision, unusual redness, pain, excessive tearing or discharge, and light sensitivity. While it is difficult to diagnose quickly, it can be treated with antifungal drug natamycin.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TIMES

0:00 AN EMERGENCY CALL IS RECEIVED BY POMPANO BEACH PARAMEDICS.

How well do Pompano paramedics serve residents?
In a two-year analysis of emergency calls, here is what we found:

Every second counts

[STORY BY STAFF WRITERS JEAN-PAUL RENAUD & JEREMY MILARSKY]

Six minutes. That's a national standard for the most amount of time it should take paramedics to respond to a medical emergency. Six minutes is also the time it takes for brain cells that are deprived of oxygen to die, causing irreparable damage. A South Florida Sun-Sentinel examination of one fire rescue department shows that while response time in Pompano Beach is only a little more than five minutes for much of the city, the clock continues to tick well past the six-minute mark for people most likely to need emergency aid. **RESCUE CONTINUES ON 10A**

5:15 THE AVERAGE RESPONSE TIME IN MINUTES FOR MUCH OF POMPANO BEACH

6:00 MINUTES IT TAKES FOR A BRAIN DEPRIVED OF OXYGEN TO DIE

6:41 MINUTES TO REACH CITY'S POOREST RESIDENTS

7:11 MINUTES TO REACH CITY'S MOST ELDERLY

More on the Web: To see an interactive map of rescue response times in Pompano Beach, go to www.sun-sentinel.com/rescue

Abramoff, ex-partner sentenced for fraud

Prison terms deferred while they cooperate in Capitol Hill inquiry

BY SEAN GARDINER STAFF WRITER

MIAMI • Disgraced super lobbyist Jack Abramoff and former business partner Adam Kidan were sentenced Wednesday to 70 months in prison and ordered to pay more than \$21.7 million in restitution to the bank they defrauded.

But as expected, Miami federal court judge Paul Huck stayed the sentences for 90 days so Abramoff and Kidan can continue working with authorities in a potentially widespread bribery and influence peddling investigation on Capitol Hill. Huck has the discretion to lower their prison time once their cooperation is evaluated.

"I wish I could go back in time," said Kidan, who spoke first. "There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about it and wished it could have turned out differently."

Kidan, 41, added that he's accepted full responsibility for his role in the wire fraud scheme, an apparent shot at Abramoff, who recently filed a court motion that not only asked for leniency but also blamed Kidan for much of the bank fraud scheme to purchase the Dania Beach-based SunCruz Casinos gambling ships.

"I have not attempted to hide from it," Kidan told the judge.

With his wife, Pam, sitting in the front row,

■ SUNCRUZ CONTINUES ON 8A

CASE AT A GLANCE

The sentence: 70 months in prison, three years' probation, \$21.7 million in restitution and 750 hours of community service during their supervised release.

What's next: Abramoff and Kidan are cooperating with authorities investigating possible bribes and influence peddling on Capitol Hill. Their cooperation could reduce their sentences in the fraud case.

Inside: Senate votes to rein in lobbyists. **3A**



Kidan



Abramoff

Daily Digest

Weather

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COMPLETE WEATHER ON BACK PAGE OF LOCAL

Online

Burst bubble?
Are home prices falling? Join a live Q & A with *Sun-Sentinel* Real Estate Writer Paul Owers at 1 p.m. today.

Sun-Sentinel.com

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Local

Deerfield opens investigation

Did Deerfield Beach Mayor Al Capellini use a city employee to pressure a swim instructor into dating him? The city is prepared to spend \$10,000 to investigate the situation. "We need to find out what happened," Vice Mayor Pam Militello said. **1B**

Gathering of living history

They stepped off buses marked "Century Village," "Wynmoor" and "Kings Point," but they had come so much farther than that. About 600 Holocaust survivors met in Davie on Tuesday, "not only to reminisce, but to show we're alive," said Ben Stern, 84, of Tamarac. There are an estimated 3,500 to 4,000 Holocaust survivors living in South Florida. "Ten years from now, there won't be many eyewitnesses left," said Julius Eisenstein, 84, of Sunrise. **1B**

World



Eclipse turns many heads

Schoolchildren in Ghana donned protective glasses to watch a solar eclipse that began in Brazil and cut a northwest path to Mongolia. It was "spiritual and emotional," said Canadian Brian Faltinson. The last total solar eclipse was in November 2003. **12A**

Israel's Olmert faces task

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's Kadima party emerged from Tuesday's elections as the largest faction in the 120-member Israeli legislature. Olmert must now build a broad coalition that will back his West Bank withdrawal plan. **12A**

People

Public tells Tucker goodbye

Lisa Tucker, 16, tried a song by former *American Idol* winner Kelly Clarkson, *Because of You*, and it cost her. The public voted her off the Fox show, leaving nine hopefuls in the hunt. **4A**



Nation

Muslim gets 30-year term

An American Muslim was sentenced Wednesday to 30 years in prison for joining al-Qaida and plotting to kill President Bush. Prosecutors said Ahmed Omar Abu Ali, 25, traveled to Saudi Arabia and joined al-Qaida out of hatred for the United States. The Saudis arrested him in June 2003. Prosecutors wanted a life sentence, but Abu Ali's actions "did not result in one single actual victim," the judge said. **3A**

Health

Bird flu shot needs work

The nation's first vaccine against bird flu protected only half the people who took it, and they needed stronger doses than regular flu shots. "We have a long way to go," acknowledged Dr. Anthony Fauci. **6A**

Business

Apple sets up sound barrier

Apple has released free software that allows parents to set limits on the volume of their children's iPod players. Most music players can produce sounds at as many as 120 decibels, as loud as an ambulance siren, which can lead to hearing damage. **1D**



Lifestyle

Getting more cluck for the buck

Who has the best chicken wings? We asked readers and they didn't balk. So we came up with a bracket — 16 joints going wing to wing. Looking for a champion never was such tasty work. So scope out Tark's and Chez Porky's, Duffy's Sports Bar and Wings 'n Curls and many more. This is a competition you can sink your teeth into. **2E**

Sports

Stepping away from the racket

Most tennis fans focus on the center-court action. *Sun-Sentinel* Staff Writer Ian Katz looks up, down and all around at Crandon Park Tennis Center on Key Biscayne. Take a look at another side of the Nasdaq-100 Open. **12C**

