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HEADLINE: Humidity may dampen **Lasik** success

BYLINE: By Julie Deardorff, Tribune staff reporter.

BODY:

Chicago's miserable summer heat and humidity could do more than ruin your hair. Sticky weather can also screw up laser eye surgery designed to correct poor vision, researchers have found.

In the first study to suggest that physicians might benefit from watching the Weather Channel, patients who underwent **Lasik** surgery during hot, humid weather were more likely to need follow-up measures than those who had the procedure done in cool, dry weather.

Lasik, which is short for laser-assisted in-situ keratomileusis, is used to correct nearsightedness, farsightedness and other vision disorders. It involves changing the shape of the cornea--the clear, front part of the eye that provides most of the focusing power--by cutting a flap with an ultraviolet laser.

The study was conducted in North Carolina and found that September was the worst month for **Lasik**. About 50 percent of the eyes needed fine tuning, compared with none in the drier winter months, according to Keith Walter, assistant professor of ophthalmology at Wake Forest University.

Walter, whose research was published in the April issue of the Journal of Cataract and **Refractive Surgery**, found a 10 percent increase in treatment room humidity meant 9 of every 100 patients needed a follow-up.

But outdoor temperatures and humidity in the weeks before surgery also affected the results, he said.

Walter speculated that in humid environments, the cornea can absorb more fluids. "It may only be a small amount, but with a laser, we're talking microns," he said. "With more water in the cornea, we might take off slightly less tissue and get altered results."

In Chicago, the months with the most moisture in the air are July and August, said Jim Angel, Illinois state climatologist.

"Our study doesn't mean that consumers should avoid **Lasik** surgery during the summer," said Walter. "But they should make sure that their physicians compensate for temperature and humidity."

Still, Richard Bursua, an optometrist in southern Illinois, does not recommend **Lasik** to

anyone, regardless of the month. Bursua said **Lasik** produces twice as many undesirable side effects as cataract surgery, including halos, starbursts and glare from surrounding lights at night, and dry eye problems.

"Even more significantly alarming, we now know that a thin cornea produces a greater chance of glaucoma damage," said Bursua, who sits on a panel for Surgical Eyes, a Web site created to support patients who develop complications from vision correction surgery.

"**Lasik** is thinning the cornea," said Bursua. He wondered "whether we're condemning an entire generation of people who might develop glaucoma as a result of having their corneas thinned."

NOTES: QUALITIES OF LIFE.

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