



Patient information – Accident and Emergency

Herpes Simplex Virus Keratitis

What is herpes simplex virus keratitis?

This is a viral infection of the cornea (the clear surface, or 'window' of the eye). It is usually caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV-1), the same virus that causes cold sores.

What are the symptoms?

HSV keratitis generally affects one eye but on rare occasions both eyes.

Symptoms may include:

- A red eye
- Eye pain or foreign body sensation
- Sensitivity to light
- Blurred vision
- Small blisters around the eyelid

Why have I got it?

HSV-1 is a very common virus, passed on by direct skin-to-skin contact. Most people are infected by the time they are 60 but only one in three will notice any symptoms. After the first infection, the virus remains in the nerves of the face and can re-emerge at any time. It can cause a cold sore, or an ulcer in the eye. The virus can be spread directly to the eye from a cold sore, so avoid touching your eyes if you have a cold sore present. Symptoms can be worse if you have eczema or a reduced ability to fight infections, taking medications that affect immunity, for example.

How is it diagnosed?

A clinician will examine the eye. A sample may be taken from the corneal surface to confirm the presence of HSV-1. This is performed with a cotton bud, after numbing the eye so will not be painful. A negative result does not mean you do not have HSV-1, as testing may not be positive in 100% of cases.

What is the treatment?

• Antiviral eye gel- a course of eye gel (ganciclovir) is the treatment for most cases.

• Antiviral tablets— a 7-day course of antiviral tablets (e.g. aciclovir, valaciclovir) may be required in severe and/or recurrent cases.

• **Steroid eye drops–** sometimes these are used to reduce inflammation and minimise scarring.

• Advice for contact lens wearers Contact lenses should not be worn until all symptoms have gone.

This information can be translated into other languages or made available in alternative formats, such as easy read or large print on request. Please call PALS: 020 7566 2324/ 020 7566 2325

Will it come back?

If you have HSV keratitis, it can become a recurrent problem. Similar to cold sores, the virus can re-emerge at any time. Around half the people who get HSV keratitis will get it again within five years. If you keep getting recurrent infections, your eye doctor might recommend that you take daily antiviral tablets to help prevent infections.

Will it damage my eyesight?

Severe or repeated episodes can result in scarring of the cornea, which can cause blurred vision. Infection can also damage the nerves of the cornea, leading to a lack of sensation. Each time you have an episode you should see an eye doctor as soon as possible so they can check your eye and give you the correct medication.

When to seek advice

If you develop blisters around the eye, a red or painful eye, light sensitivity, blurred vision, or new floaters you should contact Moorfields for advice or visit your GP / local A&E department.

Moorfields video consultation

https://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/emergenc y-care

Every day 9am-9pm

Moorfields direct telephone helpline

Phone: 020 7566 2345 Monday-Friday, 8.30am-9pm. Saturday, 9am-5pm. Information and advice on eye conditions and treatments from experienced ophthalmic-trained nurses.

Emergency telephone switchboard: 020 7253 3411

This is a 24-hour service for eye emergencies only. You can also go to

Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust City Road, London EC1V 2PD Phone: 020 7253 3411 www.moorfields.nhs.uk

Moorfields A&E department in City Road (open 24/7 for emergency eye problems only) for a further examination.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

Phone: 020 7566 2324 or 020 7566 2325 Email: <u>moorfields.pals@nhs.net</u> Opening hours: Monday to Friday, (9am-5pm) except bank holidays. Moorfields' PALS team provides confidential advice and support to help you with any concerns you may have about the care we provide, guiding you through the different services available at Moorfields. The PALS team can also advise you on how to make a complaint.

Your right to treatment within 18 weeks

Under the NHS constitution, all patients have the right to begin consultant-led treatment within 18 weeks of being referred by their GP. Moorfields is committed to fulfilling this right. For more information about your rights and responsibilities, please visit the Moorfields website and search <u>'Referrals</u> to treatment (RTT)'.

Administering Eye Drops

This video on the Moorfields YouTube channel demonstrates how to put in your eye drops:

https://tinyurl.com/putting-in-drops

You can also scan this QR code to watch the video:



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