

Ophthalmology department

Microbial keratitis (cornea infection)

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet has been designed to give you information about microbial keratitis. We hope it will answer some of the questions that you or those who care for you may have at this time. This leaflet is not meant to replace the discussion between you and your medical team, but aims to help you understand more about what is discussed. If you have any questions about the information below please contact us using the details on page 3.

What is microbial keratitis?

It is an infection that affects the cornea, which is the transparent layer at the front of your eye. Corneal infections are commonly associated with wearing contact lenses.

Infections can be mild to severe. If severe, urgent treatment is important as the infection can worsen rapidly and this can result in permanent vision loss.

What are the symptoms?

- Eye pain
- Sensitivity to light
- Red eye
- Watery eye
- Blurred vision

What are the risk factors?

- Wearing contact lenses
- Previous eye infections (e.g. cold sore virus or shingles)
- Previous corneal surgery or laser treatment
- Pre-existing eye disease (e.g. poor corneal sensation, corneal graft, lid abnormalities)
- Corneal abrasion
- Inflammation to eyelids
- Diabetes mellitus, or other causes of weakened immune system

What are the risk factors for contact lens wearers?

You may be putting yourself at risk of developing microbial keratitis by:

- Not washing your hands regularly
- sleeping with your contact lenses in
- showering or swimming with your lenses in
- using water to clean or store lenses
- not cleaning contact lens items (e.g. your contact lens case)
- using expired contact lenses or contact lens solution

You should avoid wearing a contact lens if your eye is red or sore, or if the lens is damaged.

How is microbial keratitis treated?

We will usually start treatment by giving you antibiotic eye drops to take hourly. If the keratitis is due to bacteria we will start treatment on hourly antibiotics. If you have a moderate to severe infection, you will need to take the eye drops hourly through the night too.

We will often need to take samples of the cornea surface, known as corneal scrapes, to identify the cause of the infection and test sensitivity/resistance to antimicrobial treatments.

We may give you drops to enlarge your pupil, as these can help ease any pain. They can also help stop your iris from sticking to your contact lens. These eye drops will temporarily blur your vision, and may increase sensitivity to light.

Follow-up

- We will follow up with you soon after the start of treatment, to make sure the treatment is working
- Some infections can be caused by rare microorganisms such as the herpes virus, fungi or acanthamoeba. If these are suspected, or there is poor response to treatment, your eye doctor may need to take swabs or change the treatment
- If the contact lens you were wearing when you developed the infection (or its storage case) has not been thrown away, please bring it to your follow-up visit. This can be useful to help identify the microorganism that caused the infection
- Avoid wearing a contact lens after an eye infection for the period specified by your eye doctor or nurse

Who can I contact for more information?

- Emergency department at Western Eye Hospital: 020 3312 3245
- Outpatients at Western Eye Hospital: 020 3312 3236
- Outpatients at Charing Cross Hospital: 020 3311 1955

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

Ophthalmology department
Published: September 2019
Review date: September 2022
Reference no: 2935
© Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust