

Eye infections of the cornea

Ophthalmology Department

Information for Patients

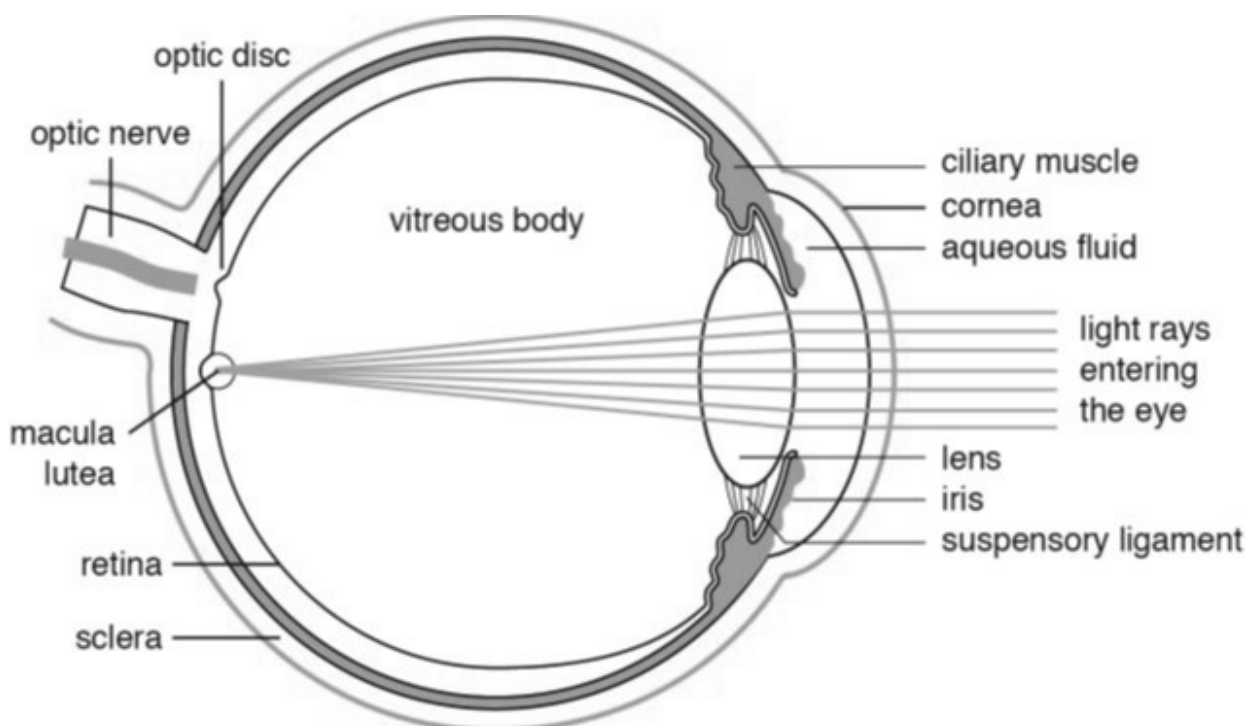
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Introduction

This leaflet is about infection in the cornea (the clear part at the front of the eye). It should help you to understand the treatment needed for this type of eye infection.



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What kind of eye infection do I have?

Eye infections are normally described by the area that is infected:

- Conjunctivitis - white part of the eye.
- Blepharitis - eyelids.
- Keratitis - clear part at the front of the eye.
- Vitritis - liquid inside of the eye.
- Chorioretinitis - back of the eye and blood vessels.
- Neuroretinitis - nerves that work with eye.

In the corneal clinic we care for patients with severe conjunctival and corneal infections. Simple infections can be managed in eye casualty.

What causes eye infections?

Eye infections are split into different groups:

- Bacterial - such as sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, Lyme disease.
- Viral - such as shingles, herpes.
- Fungal - such as candida.
- Parasitic - such as ancanthamebia.

Each will be treated with different medication.

What are the signs of an eye infection?

Signs of infection are:

- Pain, itching, feeling something in your eye.
- Reduced vision.
- Pain when in bright light (photosensitivity).
- Redness or small red lines on white of eye.
- Discharge of yellow puss, that may be crusty on waking up.
- Tears.
- Swollen eyelids.
- Constant uncontrolled blinking.

Testing for the cause of infection

Before treatment starts we may need to test the infected area to find out the cause using a method called a corneal scrape. You will have drops to numb the eye, and then the front surface of the eye will be scraped with a needle or a blade to send for testing. We can also use a cotton bud to swab the area and test for infection. This will be done in Eye Casualty or clinic.

We can get an idea of the infection within a few hours, although it can take a few weeks before we have a definite results. Generally the results confirm the treatment is appropriate.

The corneal scrape results can take a while to be processed because the laboratories grow the samples to see what caused the infection. We need to treat what type of infection we think has caused the problem.

We may need to repeat the corneal scrape if we do not see any improvement, or if results come back negative.

We will treat the eye with appropriate treatment depending on what the infection looks like.

Treatment

The type of treatment depends on the infection. You must continue treatment unless you are asked to stop by the eye doctor

In all cases you will need hourly eye drops. This would be for 48 hours, and must be given as explained by the doctor. If you have a bad infection we may admit you into hospital to make sure you receive the medication. It is important the eye drops are given as advised or the infection will get worse, and loss of vision can happen.

You will be reviewed in clinic, this could be daily for a period of time. This is important because the eye drops are very strong and need close monitoring until we can see an improvement in symptoms.

For some infections you may be given medication to take by mouth as well as your eye drops. You may also need to have blood tests.

The eye drops can be a mixture of antibiotics, anti viral, and steroids. In some cases we can use disinfecting drops.

How long will I need treatment?

This depends on what infection you have. Some infections can take months or longer to treat.

You will need to come to the hospital on a regular basis, and you may need time off work. Your eye infection may be painful and your vision might be affected.

Your GP can give you a sick note if you need longer than 1 week off work.

Outcome of treatment

Some infections get better with no damage to the cornea.

Scarring can happen on the cornea. This sometimes gets better with the use of steroid eye drops, but it may affect your vision permanently. It depends on the severity and position of the scar. There may be some options to remove the scar, which would be discussed with you in clinic.

What should I do if I think there is a problem?

You will have regular appointments in clinic. If you have any concerns, you can contact the specialist nurse team on 07970 940125, Monday to Friday - 9am to 5pm (an answer phone message can be left).

If out of the above hours, please attend Eye Casualty (0116 258 6273) - opening hours Monday to Friday - 8.30am to 4.30pm, Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays - 8.30am to 12.30pm.

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