

EPIDEMIC KERATOCONJUNCTIVITIS

WHAT IS EPIDEMIC KERATOCONJUNCTIVITIS?

Epidemic keratoconjunctivitis (also sometimes referred to as viral keratoconjunctivitis) is a highly contagious eye infection and symptoms can last up to two weeks or more. This viral infection is often caused by an adenovirus and there is no specific treatment. Bacteria, other viruses, allergies or chemical irritation can also cause types of conjunctivitis.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The symptoms of epidemic keratoconjunctivitis can commence in one or both eyes and include:

- redness, irritation and itchiness of the eyes ('pink eye')
- swelling of the eyelids
- sensitivity to light (photophobia)
- clear or yellow discharge that may make the eyelids stick together when you wake in the morning
- blurred vision
- eye pain.

Occasionally, people may also get:

- fever
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- swollen lymph nodes.

HOW DO YOU GET EPIDEMIC KERATOCONJUNCTIVITIS?

- People get epidemic keratoconjunctivitis by coming into contact with tears or discharge from the eyes of an infected person and then touching their own eyes. This can happen by touching the hands of someone with the infection, or by touching contaminated surfaces or objects.
- Usually the symptoms develop between five days and two weeks after exposure to an infected person or surface, however this can take longer.
- People are thought to be infectious from a day or two prior to the onset of symptoms until around two weeks after symptoms develop.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Anyone can get epidemic keratoconjunctivitis. It is easily spread between people.

HOW IS IT PREVENTED?

Epidemic keratoconjunctivitis is a *highly contagious* disease and children should stay home from school until symptoms have resolved or until cleared by a doctor, whichever is earlier. It is usually OK to go to work, but the infection control measures outlined below should be followed. Health care workers, however, should be clear of infection prior to returning to work.

If you have epidemic keratoconjunctivitis:

- Avoid touching your eyes whenever possible. If you do touch your eyes, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and running water
- Avoid touching other people unless your hands are freshly washed
- Throw away or carefully wash items (in hot water and detergent) that touch your eyes
- Do not share eye makeup or other items used on the eyes (i.e. towels, tissues, eye drops, eye medications)
- Use a separate towel and face cloth for each member of the household
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- Use disposable tissues to blow your nose, sneeze or cough
- If you visit another doctor or clinic, make sure you tell them that you have or have recently had epidemic keratoconjunctivitis so they can implement measures to prevent spread of infection.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Epidemic keratoconjunctivitis is diagnosed by the signs and symptoms outlined above. Your doctor may also take a swab of your eyes to identify the responsible virus. A swab takes several days to return a result.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

There is no treatment available for epidemic keratoconjunctivitis, and it will usually go away by itself in around two weeks (this can range from one to six weeks). Paracetamol and cold showers have been found to be helpful for relieving symptoms. Specific treatment is available for the other forms of conjunctivitis (bacterial, allergic).

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE?

Epidemic keratoconjunctivitis is not a notifiable disease in NSW. However public health units can provide advice on the control of outbreaks. ☒