

Herpes Simplex Keratitis (HSK)



Taking PRIDE in our health care service

What is HSK?

Herpes Simplex Keratitis (HSK) is an infection of the window of the eye called the cornea, caused by the Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV).

There are 2 types of this virus:

1. Type I is the main type affecting the cornea, the virus which causes cold sores.
2. Type II is sexually transmitted and causes genital herpes. Although unusual this virus can also cause cold sores. Most people in the world are infected with Type I HSV; it is easily spread by coughing, sneezing and touch. The infection is often picked up in childhood, and can be so mild that it is not noticed. In many people the virus stays inactive, not causing a problem. In some the virus re-activates. Re-activation in the sensory nerves of the cornea is called keratitis

How will it affect me?

Like a cold sore, the virus can re-activate from time to time, and during these episodes causes pain, redness, sensitivity to light, watering and blurred vision. Each infection may result in scarring of the cornea leading to a reduction in eyesight. Corneal ulcers can feel very painful, but with repeated infections the nerves can become damaged and less sensitive to touch. Inflammation in the cornea may also cause you to feel light sensitive. Our natural immune response for fighting off infection can sometimes have an unfavourable effect. The inflammation can cause the cornea to become swollen and cloudy, or cause new blood vessels to grow into the cornea, making vision worse. In these cases, your ophthalmologist may prescribe steroid eye drops at a low dose, to dampen the immune response. However, this must be done carefully

under close supervision, as steroid can allow the virus to replicate more easily.

How is it diagnosed?

Your eye doctor may take a swab from the surface of the eye to send to a laboratory. This can help in confirming the diagnosis. Unfortunately the tests may not prove positive even if the picture is convincing for HSK. It is unusual for a blood test to prove helpful in adults, as it can only confirm that you have been exposed to the virus at some point in your life.

How is it treated?

The treatment of HSK depends on its severity. Infections of the surface of the eye are treated with an anti-viral ointment called Acyclovir or Ganciclovir. You will need to apply this ointment five times a day for several days. The ointment helps stop the virus replicating and allows the eye to heal. It is the same ointment used to treat cold sores, although at a weaker strength. If the deeper layer of the cornea is affected, called the stroma, then antiviral ointment may not be effective alone. Steroid eye drops may be needed to reduce inflammation. Note: steroid eye drops must be used under supervision of an eye doctor, because although they improve inflammation, they can allow the virus to replicate more and make things worse.

If the infection affects only the outer layer of the cornea, the epithelium, then the infection usually settles with little or no scarring. If the infection involves the deeper layer, the stroma, then there may be scarring and loss of vision. Recurrent episodes make scarring worse. Prompt treatment minimises damage during each episode. Patients with HSK

are also vulnerable to dry eye problems because of damage to the corneal nerves. This may require use of lubricating eye drops or ointments. Corneal scarring may be difficult to overcome and require specialist contact lenses to try to reduce the irregularity of the cornea caused by scarring.

Patient Experience

Being admitted to hospital can be a worrying and unsettling time. If you have any concerns or questions you should speak to a member of staff in the ward or department who will do their best to reassure you. If you are not happy with their response, you can ask to speak to someone in charge.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Our PALS staff will provide advice and can liaise with staff on your behalf if you feel you are unable to do so. They will also advise you what to do if your concerns have not been addressed. If you wish to discuss making a formal complaint PALS can provide information on how to do this. Telephone: 0300 123 1732. Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 4.30pm. Friday 8.30am to 4pm.

An answerphone operates outside office hours. Or email us at: wah-tr.PET@nhs.net

Feedback

Feedback helps us highlight good practice and where we need to improve. There are lots of ways you can give feedback including completing a Friends and Family Test card or undertaking a survey. For further information please speak to a member of staff, see our Patient Experience leaflet or visit www.worcsacute.nhs.uk/contact-us

If you would like this leaflet in an alternative language or format, such as audio or braille, please ask a member of staff.

Polish

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Bengali

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Urdu

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Romanian

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Portuguese

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Chinese(Mandarin)

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