

Herpes Simplex (Cold sore virus)

Herpes simplex is a recurring virus and may also affect the eyes. The virus may cause conjunctivitis (which is an inflammation of the thin surface layer over the white of the eye) and keratitis (inflammation of the cornea, the front window of the eye) resulting in an ulcer.

Usually only one eye is affected. The white of the eye may appear red.

There may also be cold sores around the mouth or nose.

How will the eye feel?

There may be:

- irritation
- watering
- sensitivity to light
- reduced vision
- pain.

Is it infectious?

Yes, it can be spread by direct contact.

What treatment will help?

An anti-viral cream. Sometimes antiviral tablets are used to help prevent the virus coming back.

Will the virus come back?

It is most likely that the virus will not recur but in around 25% of cases, unfortunately the problem does become recurrent.

Occasionally the virus can cause permanent scarring of the front of the eye, problems with raised pressure in the eye and recurrent inflammation in the eye, but the majority of cases settle without causing ongoing or permanent problems.

What can I do to help?

Sun glasses may help to reduce pain when the infection starts.

Take extra care not to spread the virus to others by frequent handwashing and by using a separate facecloth and towel.

Are there any complications?

Repeated attacks of the virus may cause scarring of the cornea which will affect your sight. Occasionally, corneal grafting is considered but graft rejection is more common if the virus comes back.

What should I do if it recurs?

Please make an appointment with your GP.

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