

Watch out, your eyes too at risk of infection

Risha Chitlangia | TNN

New Delhi: Dengue and swine flu are not the only diseases stalking Delhi this season. The city is also in grip of conjunctivitis, with doctors claiming the virus this year is more virulent and patients are taking nearly a week to recover.

For now the strain of virus responsible for the infection is not known, forcing eye specialists to rely on non-steroid eye drops and antibiotics. Sources said Safdarjung Hospital and the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) were working jointly to identify the strain.

"Type of the virus responsible for conjunctivitis this year is not known. Last year, it was coxackie virus that was responsible for conjunctivitis. But we don't know all the viruses which are responsible for the eye infection and the pattern in which the infections occur," said professor K P S Malik, head of the department, Vardhaman Mahavir Medical College and Safdarjung Hospital. "So far we have sent 80 samples to NCDC. Once we know the name of the virus, treatment will become a lot easier."

Doctors said recovery from the eye infection depends on the strain of the virus. "This year, recovery is taking too long in majority of cases. Usually, the infection lasts for 3-4 days, but now patients are suffering for more

than a week. Though conjunctivitis is a viral infection, the condition often compounds due to bacterial infection," said Dr Parul Sharma, senior consultant, ophthalmologist at Max Healthcare.

With cases going up, eye specialists caution against self-medication. "We see a lot of cases where people have caused serious damage due to self-medication. People often take steroid-bases eyedrops and come to us with complication. Steroid eye-drops can cause ulceration in the eye and sometimes the damage

could be permanent," said Dr Satish Mehta, consultant ophthalmologist at Moolchand Medcity.

Doctors say around 10% of the patients suffer complications, mostly due to negligence. "Conjunctivitis should not be ignored. If cornea gets affected there could be partial vision loss. It's important to take necessary precautions," said Dr Harbansh Lal, senior consultant at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital.

Due to the viral infection, doctors have reduced the surgical procedure.

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TAKE CARE

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation or infection in the transparent membrane – conjunctiva – that lines the eyelid and part of the eyeball. As a result, small blood vessels in conjunctiva become more prominent. Ophthalmologists say they are seeing 20-30 people with conjunctivitis in OPDs everyday

Normal conjunctiva



Inflamed conjunctiva



CAUSED BY VIRUSES, BACTERIA AND ALLERGIES

Symptoms

Redness of eyes, itchiness in eyes, watery discharge in one or both eyes

Home remedies

- ▶ Apply a cold compress to the eyes
- ▶ Use eyedrops
- ▶ Avoid contact lenses

Prevention

- ▶ Don't touch your eyes
- ▶ Frequently wash hands
- ▶ Use a fresh, clean towel and washcloth daily
- ▶ Don't share towel or washcloth
- ▶ Change pillowcases often
- ▶ Don't share eye-care items or cosmetics