



Sydney Hospital &
Sydney Eye Hospital



Health
South Eastern Sydney
Local Health District

Advice to Patients

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Microbial keratitis

What is microbial keratitis?

Microbial keratitis, or MK, is an infection of the cornea (the “window” at the front of the eye). MK is usually caused by bacteria, but sometimes can be caused by a virus, fungus and other organisms.

MK occurs in all age groups but more commonly affects people who:

- wear contact lenses
- have some damage to the front of the eye through accidents
- have specific diseases which affect the eye

What are the symptoms?

MK causes a red, weeping, painful eye, often with blurred eyesight. Most people are sensitive to the light and need to wear sunglasses. Sometimes the infection can cause an ulcer on the eye surface which is seen as a white spot.

What tests are performed?

After the eye is examined with a microscope called a slit lamp, a sample from the ulcer is usually taken to help identify what type of organism is causing the infection. The eye is numbed with drops during this process but the eye can be painful as the ulcer heals. The results of these tests usually take a couple of days and help guide treatment.

What is the treatment?

The eye is treated with antibiotic eye drops. Drops are given frequently sometimes every hour and may need to be used overnight for the first couple of days. It is important to use the drops often as these infections can get worse quickly if they are not treated properly.

Sometimes admission to hospital is needed to help with the eye drops and monitor the infection more closely.

Sometimes the antibiotics need to be changed and/or the tests repeated if the infection is not responding to treatment or another drop is more effective.

Often a drop that widens the pupil (the black hole in the centre of the eye) is needed to stop painful spasms inside the eye. This can blur your eyesight and cause glare, sunglasses can help.

What is the long term effect?

Most often bacterial infections can be eradicated within one week. Fungus or Acanthamoeba infections may take weeks or months to fully treat.

If you wear contact lenses, you will need to stop during treatment. You should not start wearing contact lenses again until instructed by your eye doctor or optometrist.

In some cases, new glasses lenses or a hard contact lens can improve the eyesight. Your eye doctor will talk to you about all your treatment options.

After the infection heals, there may be a scar on the cornea that causes blurred eyesight and haloes around lights. The scar can fade with time and sometimes these symptoms improve.

Discuss with your eye doctor when you can start driving your car again.

It is important to attend all appointments so the eye can be closely checked.

Before you leave the hospital ask your doctor who you need to contact if you have any eye problems.