



York Teaching Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

Herpes Simplex

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

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Caring with pride

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What is herpes simplex?

It is a virus that infects the skin, mucous membranes, surface of the eye and nerves. There are two types:

- Type 1 causes cold sores and herpes simplex eye disease.
- Type 2 causes genital sores.

What are the symptoms of herpes simplex?

Skin infection

The virus causes the classic cold sore type blister on the skin, which may crust over before clearing.

Eye infection (herpes simplex keratitis or HSK)

The virus can affect the surface of the cornea (the clear window of the eye). Initially this causes an ulcer on the surface. This is usually quite painful especially in bright conditions. The eye is likely to be red and watery and can be blurred. Usually only one eye is affected.

Spreading the infection to another person is unlikely.

Diagnosis

The ulcer usually has a very characteristic appearance when an orange dye called fluorescein is put in the eye, especially under a microscope (slit lamp).

A swab may be taken to prove that herpes is the cause.

What treatment can I have?

The treatment is usually Aciclovir or Ganciclovir (an antiviral treatment) five times a day for up to two weeks. This may be in the form of ointment, gel or tablets and gets rid of the surface infection.

Longer term

In most cases, the infection will clear on treatment. However once the eye has been infected the virus lies dormant in your system and may recur at any time in the same eye, especially at times of illness or stress. You will be issued with a ROC (recurring ophthalmic condition card) so that you can contact the eye clinic for advice or an appointment if you feel it may have recurred.

Occasionally there can be long term problems related to HSK:

Scarring

If the ulcer is central or severe it may cause a scar in the clear part of the cornea that can affect vision. Usually this requires no treatment, but rarely may require a corneal graft if the vision is severely affected.

Anaesthesia

The surface of the eye can become numb as a result of nerve damage resulting in poor healing.

Uveitis and corneal oedema

The infection can cause inflammation that may make the cornea swollen and less transparent. This is usually treated with steroid eye drops. In this case your vision is likely to be blurred and your eye sore, so you should ring for advice. The treatment can be quite long term, as it needs to be reduced very slowly to stop the problem coming back. You may require antiviral treatment as well during treatment with steroid drops.

Glaucoma

Inflammation can lead to a pressure rise in the eye. We will look out for this. This can be treated with drops in most cases.

Prevention of recurrence

There is no treatment that will entirely stop the chance of another attack.

There is good evidence that a small dose of Aciclovir tablets twice a day can reduce the chance of a recurrence as long as you keep taking them. The tablets have very few side effects, but should not be taken if you have a severe problem with your kidneys. We will therefore need to take blood before you start and once a year if you do go on this treatment.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Eye Clinic, York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE, telephone 01904 726758 or email ophthalmologyadminstaff@york.nhs.uk.

Teaching, Training and Research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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