

Human pathogen information sheet – hygiene keeps you safe!

What are adenoviruses?

Adenoviruses are a group of pathogens that cause many diseases, e.g. of the respiratory system, the gastrointestinal tract or the conjunctiva and cornea. The viruses are highly contagious and resilient. Since particularly eye infections are transmitted frequently, the information in this leaflet refers to them only.

How are adenoviruses transmitted?

Person-to-person

The viruses are usually transmitted via hands to which the pathogens adhere. Infection may happen, e.g. after the patient touches his inflamed eyes and then shakes hands with someone else. If this hand then touches the eyes, the viruses can be passed on and cause infection.

Via contaminated objects

If patients touch the eye settled with adenoviruses and then objects or surfaces such as door handles, hand rails or fittings, the pathogens may adhere to them. Other persons may be infected by touching these objects and surfaces. Adenoviruses are also passed on by shared washing rags or flannels, shared eye drops, eye salves or dripping pipettes. This also applies to objects that come into contact with the inflamed eye, such as optical toys, such as kaleidoscopes or meters in eye medicine (tonometers). At room temperature, pathogens can sometimes cling to surfaces for several weeks, where they stay contagious.

What symptoms do the patients show?

Infectious conjunctivitis and Keratoconjunctivitis epidemica

Initially, one or both eyes will show redness, followed by swelling of the conjunctiva. Persons affected feel like they have a foreign body in the eye. The eye will itch, tear and be sensitive to light. The eye lid often swells and the lymph node in front of the ear will enlarge. In some cases, inflammation can spread to affect the eye's cornea after about a week. After two to four weeks, inflammation of the conjunctiva normally clears up on its own, although slight fogging of the cornea can persist for a while under some circumstances. As a rule, infectious conjunctivitis and keratoconjunctivitis patients make a full recovery without complications. Permanent damage to vision occurs only rarely.

What's the incubation period – and how long are you contagious?

As a rule, people fall ill 5 to 12 days after being infected.

A risk of spreading the disease starts as soon as patients display symptoms and generally lasts at least two weeks.

Who is most at risk?

Infectious conjunctivitis occurs in all age groups.

What should I do if I fall ill?

- ▶ There is no treatment for the virus. Only the symptoms can be treated.
- ▶ Do not touch your eyes with your hands, since you can otherwise pass on the pathogens via your hands.
- ▶ If you have touched inflamed eyes, immediately and thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water.
- ▶ Anybody with the disease should stay at home and observe a regime of strict hygiene, so as to avoid spreading the virus.

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What should I do if I fall ill?

- ▶ Use flannels and other hygiene articles, such as washing rags, creams, powders, etc. only for yourself
- ▶ Patients should not return to work or visit local community facilities such as schools or kindergartens until the inflammation has cleared up. Some cases may require the presentation of a medical certificate before the person is allowed to return to work at a local community facility.
- ▶ Avoid public bathing facilities and saunas during the illness.
- ▶ Important: before visiting an ophthalmologist, make sure you inform the eye doctor's surgery team if you suspect you are suffering from infectious conjunctivitis. The practice team can then take suitable protective measures.

How can I protect myself?

Hygiene keeps you safe! You should take the following **precautions if you have contact with people who have fallen ill:**

- ▶ **Top priority:** wash your hands with soap and water regularly and thoroughly!
- ▶ Avoid close contact with people suffering from the disease.
- ▶ Clean areas around the patient, if possible with disposable cloths, and then dispose of these in the household waste. Wearing disposable gloves may offer additional protection from infection.
- ▶ Use of disinfectant may be required if recommended by the health authority or your doctor.
- ▶ If you are ill, change washing rags and flannels often and wash them at a minimum of 60°C. Use only your own washing rags and flannels. Hang these in a separate location to avoid contact with other items of clothing.
- ▶ Wherever possible, avoid sharing any objects held close to the eye – such as photographic equipment, cameras, binoculars or kaleidoscopes.
- ▶ Always use your own make-up equipment and cosmetic products, such as creams, powders or eyeliners/pencils.
- ▶ Do not share eye drops: always use your own.

Where can I find out more?

Your local health authority can provide you with further advice. Since confirmed cases of adenoviruses in conjunctival swabs must be reported, they will also have the latest information and be very experienced in dealing with infections.

More (specialist) information is also available online from the Robert Koch Institute (www.rki.de/konjunktivitis).

For more information on how hygiene can guard against infection, please visit the Federal Centre for Health Education website (www.infektionsschutz.de).



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