

Trachoma



Description

Trachoma is a severe and chronic contagious infection of the conjunctival eyelid and cornea which results in severe corneal scarring.

A bacterial infection caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*, trachoma infection spreads through personal contact and connection with surfaces that have the bacteria on them (towels, clothes, bedding, doors). Flies that have been in contact with the eye or nose discharge from an infected person also spread infection.

It is the most common cause of infection blindness worldwide and can occur in communities with crowded living conditions and prevalence of dust. Trachoma is the 4th leading cause of blindness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Implications

Trachoma starts as an infection of the membrane that covers the outside of the eyeball and lines the inner surface of the eyelids (conjunctiva).

Repeated infections and immune reactions and responses cause formation of corneal blood vessels, corneal clouding, dry eyes, the eyelashes to turn inwards, and conjunctival and eyelid scarring.

The scarring causes pain and damages the surface of the cornea (responsible for providing most of the eye's optical power).

Corneal scarring can create vision concerns such as irregular astigmatism, image distortion, light and glare sensitivity (photophobia), and the development of amblyopia (lazy eye).

Untreated, trachoma scarring leads to eventual blindness.

Surgery to repair trichiasis (an eyelid with eyelashes growing inward to the eye), antibiotics, facial cleanliness and environmental improvements all improve the chances of eliminating blindness caused by trachoma.

Trachoma is common in young children. An Australian National Trachoma Surveillance and Reporting Unit (2016) screening found that of the 131 at-risk communities, almost 30% were experiencing trachoma at endemic levels with 4.6% prevalence in 5–9-year-olds.

Prevention

Practise daily good hygiene for all adults and children to prevent infections and stop the spread of bacteria.

Beginning in infancy and early childhood, build in daily face washing hygiene routines and repeat these frequently throughout the day.

Use the [Clean Faces, Strong Eyes](#) message and [Trachoma Story Kit](#) to embed strategies into school planning and curriculum.

Utilise [Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs](#) resources to stay healthy, strong and eliminate trachoma and other infectious diseases. They are:

- blow nose until empty
- wash hands with soap and water
- wash face to clean nose and eyes well
- brush teeth with toothpaste morning and night
- have a shower with soap every day
- don't share towels.

Accessing the curriculum

Seat the student at the front of the class (toward the side of the scarred eye) to ensure the best possible view of the teaching focus.

Reduce classroom glare. Avoid reflective surfaces, instruction next to windows and dim overhead lighting to reduce visual fatigue, photophobia discomfort and enhance access.

Ensure all print and digital materials are clear and uncluttered. Ensure strong contrast and consider contrast reversal (using white letters on a black background).

Reduce visual clutter by ensuring learning materials are well spaced and well organised on a page.

Remove unnecessary visual information.

Use bullet points rather than long narrative text.

Consider enlarging print and the provision of dark lined paper.

Provide additional verbal descriptions to support instruction and understanding.

Electronic access to print materials can greatly assist, especially with utilisation of the built-in accessibility features of Windows and Apple operating systems.

Magnification and low vision aids may assist.

Allow the student extra time to process visual information (if required) and to reduce visual fatigue.

When fatigue or eye pain is present, offer eye rest time.

Modify physical activities and provide detailed verbal instructions of all actions, skills and game rules (where necessary).

Encourage sunglasses and hat use when outdoors.

Click to see an [Interactive Eye Diagram](#) (web link)

As this document contains generic information, please consult with the Vision Education Program in regard to individual educational needs.

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