



Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Microbial Keratitis

Information for patients



Oxford Eye Hospital

What is microbial keratitis?

Microbial keratitis is an infection of the cornea, the clear front surface of the eye. It is most often linked to contact lens wear. Other causes include scratches to the eye or certain pre-existing eye conditions.

Risk increases if:

- Lenses are worn overnight.
- Lenses are not cleaned or stored correctly.
- Disposable lenses are used for longer than recommended.
- Lenses are worn while swimming, showering or bathing.

This condition can cause permanent scarring and loss of vision if not treated quickly.

What symptoms should I look for?

You may experience:

- a painful, red eye
- blurred or reduced vision
- sensation of something in the eye
- sensitivity to light
- watering or discharge
- a white spot may be visible on the cornea, which is the ulcer.

What tests are needed?

Your eye may be gently numbed with anaesthetic drops so a small sample can be taken from the ulcer. This helps identify the bacteria causing the infection and guides the best treatment. Results can take a few days.

How is it treated?

- Frequent **antibiotic eye drops**:
 - » Sometimes every hour, day and night at first.
 - » Frequency is reduced as the infection improves.
- The type of antibiotic may be changed based on test results.
- You must use drops exactly as prescribed to prevent worsening.

If you are unsure how to apply eye drops, search online for **“NHS eye drop technique video”**.

Do not wear contact lenses until your specialist confirms full recovery. After treatment, have your lenses and fit checked before restarting use.

Follow-up

You may be reviewed again within a few days to confirm improvement. If the infection is mild, follow-up may only be required if symptoms worsen.

Contact lens safety advice

To reduce the risk of future infections:

- Wash and dry hands before handling lenses.
- Never re-use daily disposable lenses.
- Remove lenses if eyes are red, painful or watering.
- Avoid wearing lenses when swimming, bathing or showering.
- Never sleep in contact lenses.
- Keep cases clean and replace them regularly.
- Do not allow lenses to come into contact with tap water.

Contacting us

If you have a minor eye problem, please seek advice from your GP, optician or pharmacist.

Call our specialist telephone triage number if you need **URGENT** help or advice or if you notice:

- Redness and/or swelling of your eye lids and/or eyeball
- Any loss of sight
- Intense pain

Telephone: **01865 234 567**, select the option for “Eye Emergencies”

Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm

Saturday and Sunday 8:30am to 3:30pm (including Bank Holidays)

You will be able to speak to an ophthalmic health professional who will advise you.

If you need advice out of hours, please phone **NHS 111** or your out of hours GP practice.

Further information:

Visit the NHS Website – www.nhs.uk

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Author: Aisling Higham
April 2026
Review: April 2029
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information



Making a difference across our hospitals

charity@ouh.nhs.uk | 01865 743 444 | hospitalcharity.co.uk

OXFORD HOSPITALS CHARITY (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1175809)

