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Viral Conjunctivitis

Adenovirus is by far the most common cause of viral conjunctivitis, although the condition can also be caused by other viruses. Viral conjunctivitis often occurs in community epidemics, with the virus transmitted in schools, workplaces and physicians' offices. The usual modes of transmission are contaminated fingers, medical instruments and swimming pool water.⁴ Proper hand and instrument washing following patient contact can help to reduce the spread of this highly contagious infection.¹⁸

Patients with viral conjunctivitis typically present with an acutely red eye, watery discharge, conjunctival swelling, a tender preauricular node, and, in some cases, photophobia and a foreign-body sensation. Occasionally, patients also have subconjunctival hemorrhage (*Figure 9*). Both eyes may be affected simultaneously, or the second eye may become involved a few days after the first eye (*Figure 10*). Some patients have an associated upper respiratory tract infection.

Since the ocular infection is contagious for at least seven days, patients should be instructed to avoid direct contact with other persons for at least one week after the onset of symptoms. Treatment is supportive. Cold compresses and topical vasoconstrictors may provide symptomatic relief. Topical antibiotics are rarely necessary, because secondary bacterial infection is uncommon.⁴



FIGURE 9. Acute adenovirus conjunctivitis with subconjunctival hemorrhage.



FIGURE 10. Bilateral acute adenovirus conjunctivitis.



FIGURE 11. Toxic conjunctivitis secondary to topical neomycin therapy and characterized by a lymphoid follicular reaction of the tarsal conjunctiva.