

Shining a Light on Trachoma

Trachoma is the world's leading cause of preventable blindness of infectious origin, causing blindness or visual impairment in more than 1.9 million people annually.

1 What is Trachoma?

Trachoma is a bacterial infection that affects the eyes. It is most prevalent in areas that lack adequate access to water and sanitation. It is estimated that 142 million people in 44 countries live in trachoma endemic areas and are at risk of blindness or visual impairment due to the infection.

2 Cause

Trachoma is caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis* and is highly contagious. Direct or indirect contact with eye, eyelid, nose or throat discharge from an infected person or flies that have been exposed to discharge from an infected person are common ways the infection spreads. Children under the age of five are most susceptible to infection as rates of infection drop and the length of infection become shorter in duration with increased age.

3 Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of trachoma affect both eyes and are more severe in the upper eyelid. Common symptoms include mild itching and irritation of the eyelid, discharge from the eyes containing mucus or pus, eyelid swelling, light sensitivity, and eye pain. The disease progresses slowly, and often more severe symptoms do not emerge until adulthood.

4 Diagnosis

Trachoma can be diagnosed through a physical examination of the eyes for inflammation or scarring or through lab tests performed on a sample of discharge or fluid from the eyes if a patient has been in an area where trachoma is prevalent.

5 Treatment

Trachoma treatment options depend on the stage of the disease. In the early stages, treatment with antibiotics may be enough to eliminate the infection. Treatment in later stages of trachoma may require surgery. Consult your healthcare provider to determine which form of treatment is right for you.

Prevention

While no vaccine is available, prevention is possible. The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed a strategy to prevent trachoma with the goal of eliminating it by 2020. The strategy called SAFE involves Surgery to treat advanced forms, Antibiotics to treat and prevent the infection, Facial cleanliness through proper sanitation techniques, and Environmental improvements in water sanitation.

Learn more about the SAFE strategy at:

<https://www.who.int/blindness/causes/trachoma/en/>

References:

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/trachoma>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/trachoma/symptoms-causes/syc-20378505>

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/disease/trachoma.html#one>