

Columbus Ophthalmology Associates
HERPES SIMPLEX

What is herpes simplex?

Herpes simplex is a virus that often affects human beings. There are two types of the virus. Type 1 causes “cold sores,” as well as the eye disease known as herpes simplex keratitis.

The herpes virus usually affects humans during adolescence. This initial infection can sometimes be so mild that it has no symptoms. The virus will then invade the body, usually in the skin or in the nerves, around the eye or mouth. When reactivated, it can cause a recurrent cold sore on the mouth or infect the cornea of the eye.

What is herpes keratitis?

Herpes keratitis is an infection of the cornea and can be sight threatening. The eye is red, sensitive to light and painful. If an ulcer forms on the surface of the cornea, patients will have pain or a foreign body sensation similar to having a piece of dust in the eye.

Herpes simplex keratitis usually affects just one eye. It is important to realize that this is not a sexually transmitted type of herpes, but is the same virus that causes cold sores and fever blisters.

What treatment is available?

Treatment is essential to prevent scarring of the cornea, which can lead to loss of vision. Anti-viral eye drops will be used sometimes as often as one drop every hour, depending on the severity. If severe scarring results or recurrent infections take place, then surgery may be necessary.

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