



Coronavirus: How eyes may play a role in its spread

Our eyes might play an important role in the spread and prevention of the coronavirus outbreak seen throughout the world. To cut your personal risk of contracting the coronavirus, **avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands**. The mucous membranes that line various cavities in the body are most susceptible to transmission of the virus. Patients who have contracted the coronavirus may have ocular symptoms including Conjunctivitis - an inflammation of the membrane covering the eyeball. This is often referred to as “pink eye” and often presents as an infected/red, “wet and weepy” eye. Conjunctivitis is very contagious, and a patient can cause the spread from one eye to the other.

Reduce your exposure:

1. **Coughs and sneezes:** The coronavirus could get into the eye through aerosol transfer. “That’s if you’re standing within six feet of someone who has the virus, they cough or sneeze, and you aren’t wearing any protective eyewear,” says Stephanie Marioneaux, MD, clinical spokeswoman for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash.

2. **Touching the eyes:** The coronavirus also could be transferred from the hands to the eyes. For example, you could get coronavirus in your eye if someone with the virus touches a grocery store cart handle, then you use the same cart and touch your eyes, Marioneaux says.

Prevention is the best medicine: Four ways to reduce your chances of getting viral conjunctivitis:

1. **Wash your hands the right way:** Review the five steps to washing hands correctly from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Wet your hands, turn off the tap, apply soap, lather and scrub for 20 seconds, then rinse. After washing your hands, air dry them or use a clean towel.

2. **Don’t touch your eyes:** Resist the urge to dab, rub or wipe your eyes, or touch other parts of your face, whether or not you have symptoms of illness right now. Do not touch your eyes unless you use a clean tissue.

3. **Avoid sharing personal items:** Do not share items such as contact cases, eye drops, face makeup or makeup brushes, pillow cases, bath or hand towels, the CDC recommends. Conjunctivitis is very contagious, and a patient can cause the spread from one eye to the other.

4. **Switch from contacts to glasses:** Contact lens wearers may want to switch to glasses temporarily. Many contact lens patients touch their eyes without even thinking about it. So maybe wear glasses until the coronavirus scare is over.

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Get the latest public health information from the **Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):**

<https://www.coronavirus.gov>

Get the latest research information from **National Institutes of Health:**

<https://www.nih.gov/coronavirus>