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Resident's Corner

Eye Care during COVID 19 Pandemic

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Brief communication

Corona pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus has devastated lives and economies all over the world. COVID disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 has killed thousands of people across nations and crippled day to day lives of millions. Basically it's a respiratory illness caused by spread of the virus through nose and mouth of the infected person through droplets to healthy ones. The usual symptoms are fever, mostly dry cough, sore throat and difficulty in breathing. People with severe infections can develop pneumonia and die from varied complications of the illness.

Eye care during COVID pandemic appears to be a neglected subject. When an infected person talks or sneezes, s/he may inadvertently infect the other person by spraying the virus laden droplets that are either inhaled by the other through nose or mouth or virus may enter through eyes. You can also become infected by touching something that has the virus on it and then touching your eyes. Therefore appropriate precautions are advocated to be taken by everyone to prevent COVID from spreading from one person to another especially through eyes.

Though, it is unlikely that COVID patients spread virus (SARS-CoV-2) through their tears and just single patient out of 17 developed conjunctival injection and chemosis i.e. pink eye. Two out of 12 patients with ocular abnormalities (16.7%) had positive results for SARS-CoV-2 on RT-PCR from both conjunctival and nasopharyngeal swabs. Another study showed positive SARS-CoV-2 RT-PCR results from a patient's tears, but isolation of the virus was unsuccessful. Therefore there is no evidence of spread of virus from infected patients through tears however low abundance of the virus in tear and conjunctival secretions does not eliminate the risk of transmission through conjunctival tissue that may also have implications in corneal transplant. However health care workers can get infected through droplet exposure to their eyes. At least there is a report of death of an ophthalmologist in Wuhan in early stages of the pandemic following exposure to the

virus from an asymptomatic COVID patient having acute angle-closure glaucoma in early January, 2020. Another doctor got the infection in Wuhan through inoculation of the virus through his eyes. He wore an N95 mask but did not wear anything to protect his eyes. Respiratory viruses are capable of inducing ocular complications in infected patients, which then leads to respiratory infection.

We need to postpone elective surgeries in the light of ongoing pandemic and attend only urgent eye care procedures after taking all precautions including full Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE) along with eye glasses. General public also need to be made aware of this uncommon route of virus transmission and to report to COVID clinic in case they develop red eye or conjunctivitis. Routine washing of eyes by general public and health care professionals should also be recommended to save them from infection from unlikely source especially from an asymptomatic carrier of SARS-CoV-2.

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