

COVID-19 THE NEW PANDEMIC

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects on all aspects of human life, including eye health. While the virus primarily affects the respiratory system, studies have shown that it can also involve other systems and organs including the eye where it can cause various symptoms and complications. Earlier this year, significant concerns about the effects of COVID-19 on eye health had been recognised, with many experts warning of potential long-term consequences for patients.

One of the most common eye symptoms associated with COVID-19 is conjunctivitis, or pink eye, which can cause symptoms such as redness, itching, burning, and discharge from the eye. While the condition is usually mild and resolves on its own within a few weeks, in some cases it can lead to more serious complications, such as corneal damage or scarring.

There have also been reports of other eye-related symptoms in COVID-19 patients, including photophobia (sensitivity to light), blurred vision, and eye pain. These symptoms are thought to be related to body's immune response to the virus, which can cause inflammation in various parts of the body, including the eyes. In some cases, the eye symptoms may be the first or only symptoms of COVID-19, making it important for eye care providers to be aware of the potential link between the virus and eye health.

One of the major concerns for the ophthalmologists was the potential for COVID-19 to cause long-term eye complications. Studies have shown that the virus can cause damage to the blood vessels in the eye, leading to cotton wool spots and retinal microhemorrhages (retinopathy). This complication could be serious, albeit very rare, and might lead to vision loss or even blindness if left undetected or untreated in time. While the long-term effects of retinopathy in COVID-19 patients are still unknown (limited to a few case reports only), it is clear that the virus can have a significant impact on eye health.

Another area of concern is the potential for COVID-19 to exacerbate existing eye conditions, such as glaucoma or macular degeneration. Whether this is due to the disease itself or the result of medication used to treat COVID-19, such as steroids, is not known but these conditions are already a leading cause of vision loss and blindness in older adults, and the added stress of COVID-19 on the body could potentially worsen these conditions. In addition, many patients with these conditions may have delayed or postponed eye care appointments due to concerns about the virus, which could further aggravate the

problem.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on the way that eye care is delivered. Many eye care providers have had to close or reduce hours due to lockdowns and social distancing measures. The latter in particular could lead to difficulties/ delays in care for many patients such as modifications to slit lamps and addition of screens with reluctance to do direct ophthalmoscopy fearing proximity to a potential carrier. In addition, patients may be hesitant to seek care for eye-related symptoms or conditions due to concerns about exposure to the virus. This could lead to delays in diagnosis and treatment, which could have long-term consequences for patients' eye health.

Despite these challenges, there have been some positive developments in the field of eye care during the pandemic. Telemedicine has emerged as an important tool for eye care providers, allowing them to conduct virtual consultations and follow-up appointments with patients. This has helped to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus while still providing essential eye care services. In addition, many eye care providers have implemented strict safety protocols, such as increased cleaning and disinfection, to help protect patients and staff from the virus.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on eye health, with many patients experiencing eye-related symptoms and concerns. While the long-term effects of the virus on eye health are still unknown, it is clear that COVID-19 can cause serious complications and it is important for patients to seek care for eye-related symptoms or concerns as early as possible.