Patient Information – Accident and Emergency

Ocular foreign body

What is an ocular foreign body?
An ocular foreign body is a common condition, in which a small particle (such as a piece of grit or small rust particle) becomes stuck on your eye. If the object becomes stuck on the cornea – the front window of your eye – this is called a corneal foreign body. If the object is stuck under your lid, this is called a sub-tarsal foreign body, which may cause scratches to the surface of your cornea. If a corneal foreign body is metal, a small ring of rust may form around it and this may also need to be removed.

What are the symptoms?
The surface of your eye contains many nerves, which makes it very sensitive to any scratch or foreign body on the front of your eye. Your eye may be painful, red, watery and light sensitive and your vision may be blurred.

What is the treatment?
The doctor or nurse will use local anaesthetic eye drops to numb your eye and will remove the foreign body with a cotton bud or a small sterile needle. The feeling of “something in the eye” or pain may return after the anaesthetic drops wear off, usually between 20 to 60 minutes. The pain usually subsides in a few days as your eye heals, but your eye may feel gritty for a few weeks.

Anaesthetic drops cannot be prescribed to take home as regular use will slow the healing of your eye. Painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen (if you have no medical reason which prevents you using non-steroidal painkillers) are available over the counter at a chemist or on prescription and can be used to help with the pain.

Antibiotics drops or ointment may be prescribed to prevent infections from developing. Lubricants (artificial tear drops) are available on prescription or over the counter to help keep your eye comfortable while it heals. You may be asked to return for a follow-up appointment if there is residual foreign body, signs of infection or inflammation.
When to seek advice
If your eye sight becomes more blurred, your eye become more red or painful or you develop an enlarging white spot on the cornea, you should telephone Moorfields Eye Hospital Direct for advice on 020 7566 2345 or attend your local A&E department or the Moorfields 24/7 A&E department which is open for emergency eye problems only for a further examination.

Moorfields’ PALS team provides confidential advice and support to help you sort out any concerns you may have about the care we provide, guiding you through the different services available at Moorfields. The PALS team can also advise you on how to make a complaint.

Your right to treatment within 18 weeks
Under the NHS constitution, all patients have the right to start their consultant-led treatment within 18 weeks of being referred by their GP. Moorfields is committed to fulfilling this right, but if you feel that we have failed to do so, please contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS) who will be able to advise you further – see above for contact details. For more information about your rights under the NHS constitution, please visit www.nhs.uk/choiceinthenhs.