Allergy in the eye

What are vernal keratoconjunctivitis (VKC) and atopic keratoconjunctivitis (AKC)?
These are types of allergic eye conditions that cause soreness, itching and redness of the eyes and eyelids and sometimes blurry vision. The conditions are very like eczema but affect the membrane of the eye and inside the eye lids (the conjunctiva) instead of the skin. Like eczema, it can continue for some time (months to years) but most young people grow out of it.

What causes it?
If you or your family have allergic diseases such as eczema or asthma, you are more likely to get an eye allergy. Everyone has an immune system (for instance antibodies) which help to fight off germs which could cause infections. Allergic diseases happen when the immune system reacts to harmless substances like dust or pollen. In some people it affects breathing (asthma), the skin (eczema) and, less commonly, the eyes. Allergy tests are not helpful. Most people affected have allergies to many things in the environment but, as with asthma and eczema, knowing this does not help treat the problem.

Treatment
Anti-allergy drops need to be used regularly every day. They should not be stopped unless you have been advised to do so, even if your child’s eyes feel better, or the problem might return or cause eye damage. Some children need drops only for a few weeks in hot weather, some need them during the whole spring and summer, others need them all year round. If there is eczema on the eyelid skin, you could be asked to use cream or ointment to treat it. It is very important to discourage your child from rubbing or scratching the eyes as this will make them worse.

Sometimes, the edges of the eyelids are very sore (blepharitis) and need some treatment (see blepharitis leaflet). If your child’s eyes are very inflamed or the window of the eye (cornea) is affected, which can affect the sight, stronger drops
such as steroids may be prescribed. Steroids usually make eyes feel better quickly, but they can have side effects so it is important that these drops are used exactly as prescribed and that you keep your appointments in the clinic.

Further check-ups
In some cases, your doctor may be able to discharge your child straight from casualty and there is no need to return for a check-up. In other cases your child may need regular eye clinic check-ups.

What to look out for:
- The eyes are painful
- Redness, swelling and itching are getting a lot worse
- The vision becomes worse over time

If you are worried please call the advice line below or alternatively you can attend casualty for a further examination.

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The Children’s Eye Casualty is in the Richard Desmond Children’s Eye Centre
Opening hours 9am - 4pm Monday to Friday. Outside of these hours, please attend the main eye casualty at Moorfields.

Moorfields Direct telephone helpline
Phone: 020 7566 2345
Monday to Friday, 9am to 4.30pm, for information and advice on eye conditions and treatments from experienced ophthalmic-trained nurses.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)
Phone: 020 7566 2324 or 020 7566 2325
Email: pals@moorfields.nhs.uk
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.