

# Pink Eye Disease Surge in Pakistan: A Silent Epidemic of Adenoviral Conjunctivitis Demanding Urgent Action to Prevent Long-term Ocular Morbidities

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Dear Editor! infectious disease has always been a challenge and burden on healthcare system of Pakistan. Beside other infectious diseases in the recent years, there has been increase in cases of adenoviral conjunctivitis affecting almost all parts of the country from Karachi to Lahore reporting over 288000 cases in 2023 from January to September alone.<sup>1,2</sup> No, doubt, Adenoviral Conjunctivitis has always been an important ocular infection around the globe causing a large part of over 65-90% of total vial conjunctivitis.<sup>3</sup> In Pakistan during 2024, this infection has quietly escalated into an epidemic, impacting nearly all major cities. Over 13,473 cases have been reported in various government hospitals within a span of thirty days (August-September 2024).<sup>2</sup> On Tuesday, September 4, a total of 907 cases were reported within just 24 hours, highlighting the widespread nature of the outbreak.<sup>4</sup>

The rapid spread of this infection is linked to close contact with infected individuals, as well as exposure to contaminated hands, medical devices, saliva, tears, and respiratory droplets. Infected individuals can carry and transmit the virus for up to two weeks, making isolation necessary to prevent spreading it to healthy people.<sup>5</sup> The common symptoms experienced by the infected individuals are; watery eyes, photosensitivity, blepharitis, irritation, ocular discomfort, erythema and in some cases subconjunctival hemorrhage, chemosis and follicle formation. The infection is self-resolving and the symptoms go away on their own without any

specific treatment. However, if eyes are vigorously rubbed or superinfection occurs it may lead to serious ocular morbidities like subepithelial infiltrates, corneal ulceration and even visual impairment.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding treatment, there is no definitive cure or FDA-approved medication for this infection. However, discomfort can be alleviated, and severity reduced with proper care, hygiene, and symptomatic treatments such as topical antibiotics, NSAIDs, and ointments. Notably, off-label use of antiseptic Povidone-Iodine (PVP-1) and dexamethasone has shown to be safe, well-tolerated, and supported by evidence for improving clinical recovery from the condition.<sup>6</sup> Given the highly transmissible nature of the disease, it is crucial to promote personal hygiene, limit contact, and avoid sharing personal items with infected individuals to contain the infection at its earliest stage.

In short, the current spike of adenoviral conjunctivitis across the country is something more than just an ocular concern. It highlights a crucial public health threat demanding immediate, well-coordinated and multi-disciplinary action. Procrastinated response may lead to harsh consequences of widespread outbreak and exacerbation of burden of disease on already strained healthcare system of Pakistan. Considering all the circumstances it is inevitably imperative that medical professionals, healthcare authorities and public officials should collaborate to raise awareness, enforce preventive measures and harness the disease by timely interventions. Strong measures, decisive and swift action along with enhanced public awareness will not only curb the ongoing crisis but also prevent future epidemics and outbreaks.

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