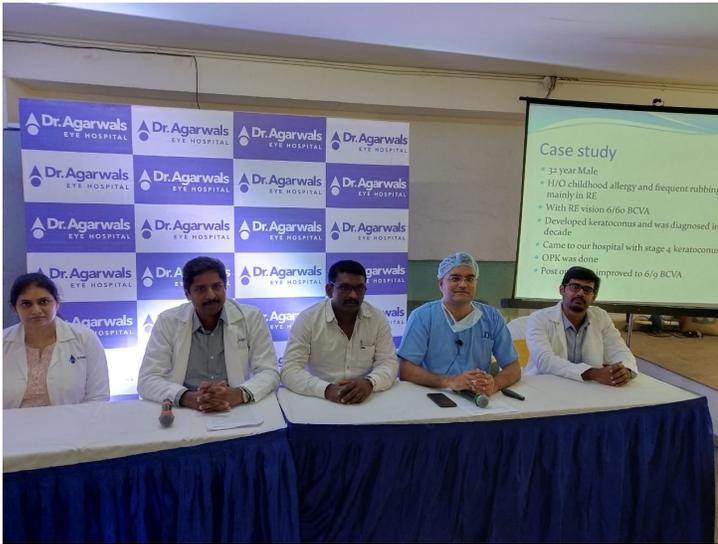


Eye allergies increase the risk of distorted vision in children

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Dryness and inflammation in eyes increases the incidence of eye allergies.



Increasing incidence of eye allergies among children due to rising pollution and exposure to mobile phone screens is leading to thinning of cornea and blurred vision, said ophthalmologists of Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital. The condition, called keratoconus, is a progressive eye disease in which the cornea becomes thin and begins to bulge into a cone-like shape. This cone shape deflects light as it enters the eye on its way to the retina, affecting the ability of the child to see properly.

Said **Dr. Raghu Nagaraju Senior Consultant, Cornea & Refractive Surgery, Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital, Bengaluru** "The incidence of eye allergies among children is rising due to increasing pollution. Also, widespread exposure to artificial lights and computer and mobile screens is causing dry eyes. Dryness and inflammation is a vicious combination which leads to eye allergies. When children keep rubbing their eyes due to allergies, it causes keratoconus."

If keratoconus has progressed beyond moderate grade, children cannot hope to get 100 percent vision back even if they start wearing the best of correctional glasses or contact lenses. The treatment of keratoconus involves collagen crosslinking, but this can only halt further progression of the disease, not fully restore the vision which has already been lost. In severe cases, cornea transplant is the only solution.

Dr Ravi, Medical Director, Senior Consultant, Cataract Oculoplasty Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital, Bengaluru added: "About one child in 1,500 in India suffers from keratoconus. Children between 10 to 15 years are especially vulnerable. If eye allergy is severe, children as young as 8 years can suffer from the condition. Since keratoconus is a progressive disease, it can keep advancing for years, worsening vision gradually, unless treatment is taken. Cases of keratoconus have risen by 10% in India in the last five years, mainly due to rise in the incidence of eye allergies among children. Luckily, with advances in diagnostic tools, it is possible to diagnose the condition in very early stages." In Dr Agarwal's eye hospital we have seen an average of 20-25% raise in patients who are freshly diagnosed to have keratoconus. In 2017-18 we had diagnosed 400 cases of keratoconus and in 2018-19 we had seen 480 patients with keratoconus. There is significant raise in patients who

have undergone treatment for keratoconus.

Symptoms of keratoconus include blurred vision even after using correction glasses. Patients often feel itching in the eye, sensation of a foreign body in the eye, or some sort of visual disturbance that troubles them in their day to day activities.

Dr Preethi, Consultant Ophthalmologist Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital, Bengaluru Said:“Any child who is rubbing eyes frequently needs treatment for allergy, as well as eye examination by a corneal specialist to rule out keratoconus. This condition is also suspected in cases where blurred vision does not improve even after wearing glasses. As precaution, parents should limit exposure of children to dust, get treatment for allergies, avoid too much artificial light, limit exposure to computer, phone or TV screens.”

Dr Raghu Nagaraju of Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital showcased the treatment of a 32-year-old patient Yuvraj who was suffering from keratoconus in one eye. His eye condition turned severe with best vision reduced to only 6/60. Initially, the doctors tried non-surgical interventions, but the patient was not very comfortable. Since his cornea was very thin with scarring, surgeons therefore opted for optical keratoplasty (cornea transplant). The patient's vision drastically improved to 6/9 post-surgery and he can now see well.