

# Feline Conjunctivitis

## Ophthalmology Service



Michigan Veterinary  
Specialists<sup>sm</sup>

www.michvet.com

We Can Help

### LOCATIONS:

29080 Inkster Rd.  
Southfield, MI 48034  
(248) 354-6660

3412 E. Walton Blvd.  
Auburn Hills, MI 48326  
(248) 371-3713

1425 Michigan St. NE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503  
(616) 284-5300

### Causes

Feline conjunctivitis is most frequently caused by an **infectious agent** (see below). Other causes include tear dysfunction, drug sensitivities, allergies, etc.

### Symptoms

The **conjunctiva** consists of the pink tissue which surrounds the eye and lines the underside of the eyelids. When this tissue becomes irritated and inflamed it becomes much more prominent and noticeable (**chemosis**). Other signs of ocular irritation may be seen with conjunctivitis including increased **tearing**, more frequent **blinking**, and holding the eye partially closed. These symptoms may be present in one or both eyes. Many cats being presented for evaluation of conjunctivitis have a history of **upper respiratory tract infections**.

### Feline Herpesvirus

Feline Herpesvirus is the most common infectious cause of feline conjunctivitis. This virus is often acquired as a kitten and remains in an **inactive state** in nerves until times of stress. During times of stress when the body's immune defense is decreased, the virus is able to reactivate and replicate causing unilateral or bilateral conjunctivitis, ocular discharge, and occasionally superficial ulcers on the cornea. This virus is also able to cause concurrent cold symptoms such as sneezing and nasal discharge. Typically, the clinical signs are the most severe during the initial infection with the virus (usually as a kitten). The level of stress that causes reactivation of the virus varies greatly between individuals. Treatment is aimed at **minimizing stress** and giving **supportive care** (e.g. keeping the eyes and nose clean and clear of discharge). For individuals that do have frequent recurrence of symptoms, the amino acid **L-lysine** may be recommended as a dietary supplement. This amino acid does not treat acute outbreaks of the disease, but has been shown to decrease the frequency of recurrences.

### Eosinophilic Keratitis/Conjunctivitis

This disease has no known cause, but it has been associated with herpesvirus infection and allergies. Aside from conjunctivitis this disease may cause cells to infiltrate the cornea giving it a cloudy appearance. Diagnosis is made based **cytology** of corneal and/or conjunctival swabs. The appearance of a certain cell type (**eosinophils**) on cytology confirms the diagnosis. Treatment is aimed at decreasing the immune response using topical medications. Long term treatment is usually necessary.



### Mycoplasma

This bacteria may not be able to cause disease on its own and may be a more important cause of conjunctivitis in cats that have concurrent Herpesvirus infection or have weakened immune systems. Treatment involves topical and possibly systemic antibiotics.

### Chlamydophilia

This is a bacteria that may cause mild upper respiratory signs and severe conjunctivitis. The conjunctivitis may begin in one eye, but usually spreads to the other eye within 7 to 14 days if no treatment is initiated. Cats with long-standing chlamydophilia conjunctivitis may develop a nodular appearance to their third eyelid. Diagnosis of chlamydophilia conjunctivitis is made based on clinical signs and **cytology**. Treatment involves applying topical antibiotics to the eye.

### Examination

- **Schirmer tear test**
- **Flourescein staining** to look for corneal ulcers
- **Intraocular pressure**
- **Slit-lamp examination and indirect ophthalmoscopy**
- **Cytology or culture/sensitivity** may be recommended