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CORNEAL ULCERATION

What is it? A cut or abrasion on the clear surface of the eye (the cornea).

Who gets it? Any animal can sustain an eye injury. However, breeds at risk for these types of injury include animals with “bug eyes” or eyes that stick out from their face – for example: Boston Terriers, Pekingese, Himalayan or hunting dogs, outdoor cats or pets that fight with other cats, or pets that already have decreased vision (e.g. dogs that have cataracts).

What are the clinical signs? Pain – typically characterized by excessive blinking, holding eye closed, head shyness, excessive tearing, discharge from the eye (can be green or yellow or clear), redness of the conjunctiva, and pawing at the eye.

How is it diagnosed? Examination of eye with a magnification device called an ophthalmoscope as well as fluorescein stain of the eye.

How is it treated? The majority of ulcers or lacerations of the cornea heal with simple topical medications that contain antibiotics (they must NOT contain any steroids). In addition it is important to protect the eye from further injury by the pet (an e-collar may be required). It is also important to treat for pain – either with oral medications or topical medications – or both.

If the wound is deep (penetrating or nearly the full the thickness of the cornea) – your veterinarian may recommend referral to a Board Certified Veterinarian who is a specialist in Ophthalmology. Specialists of Ophthalmology have unique equipment (e.g. an operating microscope) and the ability to deal with severe corneal injuries that could threaten the health of the eye or vision.

What is the aftercare? Recheck with a veterinarian in 24-36 hours is very important. At this recheck, the eye will typically be re-stained with fluorescein stain. Any changes in the eye that indicate the condition is worsening will need to be addressed immediately. Otherwise, problems can rapidly progress to a state where the eye or vision is threatened. If things are healing well, generally 3-4 days of treatment is enough for small lacerations or ulcerations to heal. Obviously, larger injuries may require other follow up or longer term care.

What is the prognosis? Small injuries have an excellent prognosis for complete healing with no compromise to vision. Larger injuries, or small injuries left untreated, can result in blindness or the potential for loss of the eye.