

# Decline in infectious conjunctivitis during COVID-19 pandemic

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(HealthDay)—There was a population-wide decrease in the rate of

infectious conjunctivitis in association with public health interventions adopted to curb COVID-19, according to a study published online Nov. 18 in *JAMA Ophthalmology*.

Juan M. Lavista Ferres, from Microsoft Corporation in Redmond, Washington, and colleagues examined whether internet search interest and [emergency department](#) visits for infectious conjunctivitis were associated with public [health](#) interventions adopted during COVID-19. Data were compared before and after April 2020, when public health interventions were recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The researchers found that from January 2015 to February 2021, there were 1,156 emergency department encounters with a diagnosis of conjunctivitis at a single emergency department. There was a significant, 37.3 percent decrease observed in emergency department encounters for nonallergic conjunctivitis. In contrast, after adjustment for total emergency department encounters, encounters for corneal abrasion and posterior vitreous detachments remained stable. After widespread implementation of [public health interventions](#) to mitigate COVID-19, there was a 34.2 percent decrease in search interest in conjunctivitis.

"Public health initiatives may have contributed to a decline in the number of new infections nationally because there was a relative decrease in emergency department encounters for conjunctivitis during the same period," the authors write. "Search metrics in conjunction with [mobility data](#) may provide quantifiable metrics of social distancing implementation in the future and a method of surveillance of infectious conjunctivitis."

One author was employed by Microsoft Corporation; a second author disclosed financial ties to the pharmaceutical, [medical device](#), and medical technology industries, as well as Microsoft Corporation.

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