

Expert warns contact lens wearers of tap water danger

Posted Thu Jan 8, 2004 11:42am AEDT

Contact lens wearers risk their sight by washing their faces in tap water, with people in Britain in greatest danger, a leading eye specialist says.

People who wear lenses are most susceptible to a rare and painful condition caused by an amoeba that lives in tap water.

The condition, acanthamoeba keratitis, causes ulcers to form on the cornea and can lead to blindness.

"It's a ghastly disease - it's very resistant to treatment and difficult to eradicate," Dr John Dart, a specialist at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London told *New Scientist* magazine.

Rates of infection in the UK are only about one in 30,000 but this is 15 times higher than in the US and seven times as high as in the Netherlands.

Until recently, all homes in the UK had to have a cold-water storage tank and the stagnant water in them provides an ideal breeding ground for the amoeba.

Dr Dart said he believes the greatest risk comes from washing while wearing lenses and handling lenses with wet hands.

He recommended people keep tap water away from their eyes when they are wearing lenses.

-- Reuters

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