

# Fact Sheet: What is Trachoma?

**Trachoma is the world's leading cause of infectious blindness. It is caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis* and creates swelling under the inner eyelid. Repeated episodes of infection lead to scarring. The scars cause eyelashes to turn inward and scratch the eye, producing intense pain made worse by blinking. Eventually, if left untreated, the scratched cornea becomes cloudy, and irreversible blindness follows.**

## How it spreads

Trachoma spreads by personal contact (via hands, clothing, towels or bedding), or by flies in contact with infected discharge from the nose or eyes of children's faces.

## Where does trachoma exist?

Apart from existing in some of the world's poorest countries, Australia is the last developed country where trachoma still remains a problem. It isn't found in mainstream Australia, but lingers in remote Indigenous communities, where there is poor sanitation, overcrowded households and low personal and community hygiene. Young children are particularly at risk.

## Trachoma in Australia

In 2009, the Australian government committed to eliminating trachoma by 2020. Since then, trachoma rates in endemic areas have fallen from 15-20%, to 4.6% in 2015. The number of infected communities fell from 200 to 50, with hotspots still remaining mainly in and around Central Australia.



## How it is managed

International and Australian efforts to eliminate trachoma use the World Health Organisation developed strategy, a combination of interventions known by the acronym SAFE: Surgery for trichiasis (inturned eyelashes), Antibiotics, Facial cleanliness and Environmental improvement. Australia made great progress when it began funding treatment for trachoma, however personal and community hygiene needs to be improved, otherwise trachoma will bounce back.

## Preventing trachoma

Keeping every child's face clean, and ensuring functional and appropriate wash facilities are available for the community is essential. Improving hygiene will also reduce other common, serious infections.

## Trachoma and Rotary Australia

Rotary's 2017-18 International President, Ian Riseley, wants a trachoma-free Australia in 2021. That year marks Rotary's 100th year in Australia. EndTrachoma by 2020 is an opportunity for all clubs around Australia to unite and support our least advantaged Australians.

To get involved, visit our website [www.endtrachoma2020.org.au](http://www.endtrachoma2020.org.au)

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