

Conjunctivitis- Factsheet

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis, also called pink eye, is inflammation of the thin clear tissue called conjunctiva that lies over the white part of the eye and lines the inside of the eyelid. Different causes are: viral that usually results in watery eye discharge, often with a cold or other respiratory illness; bacterial which is more commonly associated with pus; allergic which usually happens in both eyes and can produce intense itching, tearing and swelling in the eyes, and may occur with other allergy symptoms such as itchy nose, sneezing, scratchy throat; irritants that can cause watery eyes and mucus discharge.

What are the symptoms of conjunctivitis?

Symptoms of conjunctivitis include: pink or red color of the conjunctiva and/or the eyelids; itching; irritation; burning; discharge such as mucus or pus; crusting of the eyelids or lashes, especially in the morning; increased tear production; feeling that something is in the eye/s or an urge to rub the eye/s.

How is conjunctivitis spread?

The viral and bacterial forms of conjunctivitis can spread from person to person through close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands, through the air by coughing and sneezing, or by touching an object or surface with the germs that cause conjunctivitis and then touching your eyes.

How long are people contagious?

Conjunctivitis generally remains contagious as long as you have tearing and matted eyes. Signs and symptoms of pink eye usually improve within 3 to 7 days.

Who gets conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is common in children and adults.

What treatment is available for people with conjunctivitis?

Most cases get better on their own without treatment. However, any newborn with conjunctivitis should see a doctor right away. You should also see a healthcare provider if you have: pain in the eye/s; sensitivity to light or blurred vision; intense redness in the eye/s; symptoms that don't improve or that get worse; a weakened immune system (such as from HIV infection, cancer treatment, or other medical conditions or treatments that weaken your immune system). If you do not need to see a healthcare provider, you can use cold compresses and artificial tears (which you can buy over the counter without a prescription) to help relieve some of the swelling and dryness. You should stop wearing contact lenses until you no longer have pink eye or your doctor says you can start wearing them again.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

If you have conjunctivitis but do not have fever or other symptoms, you may be allowed to remain at work or school, depending on the policies. School and day care centers often require children to stay home until the pink eye has resolved.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting conjunctivitis?

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or if soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Avoid touching or rubbing your eyes with unwashed hands. Don't share items such as pillows, washcloths, towels, eye drops, makeup or other items used by an infected person. If you have conjunctivitis, wash any discharge from around your eye/s with clean hands several times a day using a clean, wet washcloth or fresh cotton ball; throw away cotton balls after use, and wash used washcloths with hot water and detergent, then wash your hands again with soap and warm water.