

Conjunctivitis Fact Sheet

Conjunctivitis is an infection of the eyes commonly known as "pink eye"

It is most often caused by a virus but can also be caused by bacteria.

Symptoms of the eye include:

- Redness, irritation, itchiness; may produce lots of tears
- Clear or yellow discharge that may make the eyelids stick together, especially in the morning
- Swelling of eyelids

The tears or the discharges from the eye are infectious

People can get conjunctivitis by coming into contact with the tears or discharges from the eyes of an infected person and then touching their own eyes. Also conjunctivitis, when associated with an upper respiratory infection (common cold), can be spread by droplets (e.g., coughing, sneezing).

Anyone can get conjunctivitis

Preschoolers and school-age children get it most often because of crowding and lack of good hand washing and hygiene.

Conjunctivitis is usually a mild illness

Viral conjunctivitis will go away by itself in one to six weeks. Yellow pus may be a sign of infection by bacteria.

Symptoms suggesting a more severe eye infection include:

- Severe eye pain
- Change in vision
- Extreme sensitivity to light
- Marked heat & swelling of eyelids

An eye medication is available

- Doctors may give an eye medication depending on the cause of the infection.
- Keeping the eyelid clean and lubricating the eye with drops may decrease discomfort until the infection is gone.

People with conjunctivitis should:

- Wash their hands after touching or wiping their eyes.
- Avoid touching other people unless hands are freshly washed.
- Throw away or carefully wash items that touch their eyes.
- Not share eye makeup or other items used on their eyes (for example, towels, or tissues).
- Cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Consult your doctor in case medication is needed.
- See a doctor if the eye discharge is yellow, if the eye or eyelid is red, or if the symptoms don't start improving after 2-3 days. See a doctor immediately if the symptoms suggest a more severe infection.
- Be excluded from school and child care settings until cleared by a physician that it is not contagious, or until symptoms have resolved, whichever is earlier.