

CONJUNCTIVITIS (“PINK EYE”) - FACT SHEET

DEFINITION:

Conjunctivitis, commonly called "pinkeye" is an inflammation of the membrane that lines the eyelids and extends over the whites of the eyes (sclera).

CAUSE:

Conjunctivitis can be caused by bacteria, virus, allergy or immune response, a chemical or irritant.

CHARACTERISTICS:

A. Bacterial Conjunctivitis

- May affect one or both eyes
- Green or yellow discharge
- May be crusted shut when awakening
- Red or pink and painful eye
- Minimal or no itching
- Blurred vision that clears with blinking
- Not contagious if prescribed medications started
- Less common in children older than 5 years

C. Allergic Conjunctivitis

- Itchiness, redness and excessive tearing
- Usually affects both eyes, but not always
- Intense itching, burning, rubbing
- Nasal linings often also swollen and pale
- Not contagious

B. Viral Conjunctivitis

- Pink, swollen, watery eyes; minimal itch
- Starts with one eye; may affect both
- Sensitivity to light (Photophobia)
- Contagious sometimes before symptoms
- Contagious until signs, symptoms gone
- If caused by “adenovirus”, it comes with fever and cold and can be contagious for up to 14 days

D. Chemical Conjunctivitis (e.g., chlorine)

- Red, watery eyes
- Usually within minutes to hours after swimming or shortly after contact with irritating substance

MODE OF TRANSMISSION & CONTROL

Bacterial and viral conjunctivitis may be transmitted by:

- Contact with eye discharge
- Contaminated fingers, clothing, or other articles
- Upper respiratory tract of infected persons

Bacterial conjunctivitis can resolve without antibiotic treatment, it's usually caused by the same bacteria normally found in the throats and noses of many people and usually does not cause a problem. The role of antibiotics in treatment and preventing spread is not understood. Most resolve in 5-6 days.

HOME MANAGEMENT

- It is recommended that persons suspected of having conjunctivitis be seen by a physician so that appropriate diagnosis, treatment, and follow up can be obtained. But documentation of the visit is not required.
- Contact your child's physician for telephone or office visit.
- Contact your child's physician immediately for office visit if there is severe photophobia (very sensitive to light), pain, or swelling.
- Good hand washing technique before and after touching the eyes, nose and mouth.
- Keep child home from school only if: child too ill to participate, if accompanied with fever, if recommended by child's doctor, if requested by health department because of an outbreak, or if your child's behavior is such that close contact with other students cannot be avoided (e.g., very young children). Antibiotics are not required to return to school.