



Health Fact Sheet: Conjunctivitis

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is inflammation, swelling of the conjunctiva, the transparent membrane or thin layer of cells that cover the white part of the eyeball and the inner surfaces of the eyelids.

There are three types of conjunctivitis, each with a different cause, these are:

- Irritant conjunctivitis
- Allergic conjunctivitis
- Infective conjunctivitis

Irritant conjunctivitis occurs when an irritant, such as chlorine (often used to purify water), shampoo or an eyelash gets into the eyes making them sore. Rubbing the eyes can make the condition worse. The conjunctivitis should settle once the irritant is removed. If the eyes are very red and painful medical attention should be sought.

Allergic conjunctivitis occurs when the eyes come into contact with an allergen. An allergen is a substance that makes the immune system (the body's defense system) react abnormally, causing irritation and inflammation.

Infective conjunctivitis is very common especially in children and the elderly. This may be because children come into contact with more sources of infection at school. Cases of conjunctivitis or pink eye caused by bacteria or viruses are contagious, those caused by irritants or allergies are not.

What are the symptoms of conjunctivitis?

The symptoms differ based on the cause of the inflammation, but may include:

- Redness in the white of the eye or inner eyelid
- Increased amount of tears
- Thick yellow discharge that crusts over the eyelashes, especially after sleep
- Green or white discharge from the eye
- Itchy eyes
- Burning eyes
- Blurred vision
- Increased sensitivity to light



How is conjunctivitis treated?

- **Bacteria.** Pinkeye caused by bacteria, is treated with antibiotics, in the form of eye drops, ointments, or pills. Eye drops or ointments may need to be applied to the inside of the eyelid three to four times a day for five to seven days. Pills may need to be taken for several days. The infection should improve within a week. Take or use the drugs as instructed by your doctor, even if the symptoms go away.
- **Viruses.** This type of conjunctivitis often results from the viruses that cause a common cold. Just as a cold must run its course, so must this form of pinkeye, which usually lasts from four to seven days. Viral conjunctivitis can be highly contagious. Avoid contact with others and wash your hands frequently. If you wear contact lenses, you should throw away contacts worn while you have pinkeye and wear glasses.
- **Irritants.** For pinkeye caused by an irritating substance, use water to wash the substance from the eye for five minutes. Your eyes should begin to improve within four hours. If the conjunctivitis is caused by acid or alkaline material such as bleach, immediately rinse the eyes with lots of water and call your doctor immediately.
- **Allergies.** Allergy-associated conjunctivitis should improve once the allergy is treated and the allergen removed. See your doctor if you have conjunctivitis that is linked to an allergy.

Note: According to DHA

Conjunctivitis cases: Exclusion from school until discharge from eyes has ceased.