

GET THE FACTS

Conjunctivitis

What is conjunctivitis (pink eye)?

Conjunctivitis, often called "pink eye," causes swelling of the lining inside the eyelid and covering the white part of the eye. Viruses, bacteria, and allergens are common causes of conjunctivitis. Chemicals, such as chlorine, can also cause conjunctivitis. Allergic conjunctivitis often affects both eyes, whereas viral and bacterial conjunctivitis usually affects one eye. Bacterial conjunctivitis is a leading cause of children being absent from day care or school.

What are the symptoms?

Individuals with conjunctivitis may have increased tearing, yellow-green discharge, itching, irritation, and/or burning, feeling like a foreign body is in the eye(s), resulting in an urge to rub the eye(s). Crusting of eyelids or lashes may occur especially in the morning. Allergy symptoms such as itchy nose, sneezing, scratchy throat, may occur at the same time as eye symptoms. Cold, and flu symptoms or other respiratory infection or worsening of asthma may also occur.

How long does this disease last?

For pink eye caused by bacteria: typically, from onset of symptoms until after start of antibiotics, or as long as there is discharge from the eye

For pink eye caused by virus: It is variable, before symptoms appear and while symptoms are present (Allergic and chemical conjunctivitis is not contagious).

How is pink eye spread?

Conjunctivitis spreads when hands become soiled by infected respiratory tract secretions or by direct contact with discharge from infected eyes gets into another child's eyes. Viral conjunctivitis spreads easily and rapidly between people.

Who is at risk for pink eye infection?

Pink eye infection mostly affects infants and children less than 5 years of age, but infection can affect all ages.

What preventive measures and treatments are available?

This disease usually clears up in 7-14 days without treatment and resolves without any long-term effects. However, it may take 2-3 weeks or more for viral conjunctivitis to completely clear up. Allergic conjunctivitis clears up once the allergen or irritant is removed or after treatment with allergy medications. Doctors often prescribe topical antibiotics to treat bacterial conjunctivitis infection.



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Infected individuals or adults caring for children with this infection should avoid touching or rubbing their eyes, which can worsen the condition or spread it to the other eye. Frequent removal of discharge from around the eye(s) several times daily with a clean, wet washcloth or fresh cotton ball, can help to relieve symptoms and reduce the need to rub the eyes. Cotton balls should be discarded after use, followed by washing the used washcloths with hot water and detergent. This is followed by hand washing with soap and warm water.

Individuals with conjunctivitis should clean eyeglasses and avoid wearing contact lenses until instructed by their health care provider that it is safe to wear them again. It is important to avoid using the same eye drop dispenser or bottle for your infected and non-infected eye and avoid sharing items with the infected person..

Conjunctivitis can be prevented by washing hands frequently with soap and warm water, or alcohol-based hand sanitizer, if soap and water are not available. Wash bedding such as pillowcases, sheets, washcloths, and towels regularly with hot water and detergent.

What should schools do?

Not required to be reported.

- Notify CDPH of 10 or more individuals in a daycare/school setting who exhibit symptoms onset within a 7 day period or cases with unusual severity of illness.
- Report infection to designated staff member, or school for decision making.
- If excluded, readmit student to School after resolution of exclusion criteria. No antibiotic is required to return to school.

What are recommendations for exclusion?

No exclusion, unless:

- Child meet other criteria such as fever, and staff ability to care for other children is compromise.
- If conjunctivitis (pink eye) is accompanied by symptoms of systemic illness or if the child is unable to keep hands away from eye.
- Childcare rules: exclude if purulent drainage until after 24 hours of treatment.

For more information, visit [Pink Eye \(Conjunctivitis\) | CDC](#) or [Pink eye \(conjunctivitis\) - Symptoms and causes | Mayo Clinic](#). <http://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/089/089004070G03100R.html>

