

What is conjunctivitis (pink eye)?

Conjunctivitis, often called "pink eye," causes the white part of the eye to appear pink or red. It can also cause swelling to the white part of the eye and eyelid. 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 daycare or school.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of conjunctivitis include watery discharge, yellow-green discharge, itching, irritation, and/or burning. Crusting of eyelids or lashes may occur, especially in the morning. Allergy symptoms such as itchy nose, sneezing, and scratchy throat may occur at the same time as eye symptoms.

How long does this disease last?

It may take up to 2-3 weeks for symptoms to clear completely. For pink eye caused by a virus, an individual may be contagious while having symptoms. Individuals with pink eye caused by a bacteria may be contagious while having symptoms and until after starting antibiotics, or if there is discharge from their eye.

How is pink eye spread?

Pink eye is caused by viruses and bacteria that can spread to others. It can spread from respiratory droplets and discharge from the infected person's eye. This can happen through:

- Close contact (e.g. touching or shaking hands)
- Contact with respiratory droplets in the air from coughing or sneezing
- Touching surfaces with the germ on them and then touching your eyes without washing hands

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 happen at all ages.

What preventive measures and treatments are available?

Allergic conjunctivitis clears up once the allergen or irritant is removed or after treatment with allergy medications. There is no treatment for viral pink eye. The virus must clear on its own. Bacterial pink eye can be treated with antibiotics and usually improves within 24 hours of antibiotics. Antibiotics will not be effective at treating pink eye caused by a virus.



GET THE FACTS

People with pink eye should:

- Avoid touching or rubbing their eyes.
- Clean eyeglasses and avoid wearing contact lenses until instructed by their health care provider that it is safe to wear them again.
- Wash hands often, especially after touching their eyes.
- Avoid sharing items such as washcloths, pillows, eye drops, or makeup.

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?

Pink eye is not required to be reported however schools should:

- Notify CDPH of 10 or more individuals in a daycare/school setting who exhibit symptom onset within a 7-day period or of students with unusual severity of illness.
- Report infection to designated staff member, or school for decision making.

What are recommendations for exclusion?

Exclusion is not required, unless:

- Conjunctivitis (pink eye) is accompanied by fever or if the child is unable to keep hands away from eye.
- Care for affected child compromises staff ability to care for other children.
- Conjunctivitis (pink eye) is accompanied by fever or if the child is unable to keep hands away from eye.
- In childcare settings: if crusty or purulent (thick yellow/green) drainage is present. Students can be readmitted after 24 hours of treatment or with a note from the child's healthcare provider.

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>

