

# Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)

## What is Pink Eye?

Infectious conjunctivitis, or pink eye, is an infection of the clear membrane covering the eyeball. It is usually caused by a virus but may also be caused by bacteria. Bacterial conjunctivitis is less common in children older than 5 years of age. Allergies, exposure to chemicals, smoke and other irritants, injury, or excessive rubbing of the eye can cause non-infectious conjunctivitis.

## What are the symptoms of Pink Eye?

Infectious conjunctivitis begins with a scratchy feeling or pain in the eyes. Itchy eyes are common. It usually begins in one eye, and can spread to the other. The whites of the eyes may appear pink or red. You may also notice a discharge from the eyes, which can make the eyelids stick together in the morning. Symptoms of infectious types of conjunctivitis usually appear within 24-72 hours after being in contact with the discharge of an infected person.

## How is Pink Eye spread?

The infection is spread easily from person to person by contact with the discharge from the eyes or respiratory tract of an infected person. It can be spread on unwashed hands, contaminated clothing, and towels, make up applicators, etc. The person is contagious as long as symptoms persist.

## When can a person return to daycare/school?

- A child with pink eye should be excluded until he/she has been seen by a doctor.
- If bacterial, child can return to the childcare program and/or school after 24 hours of appropriate antibiotic treatment.
- If viral, child can return with doctor's approval.
- There is no need to exclude if there is no eye discharge unless there is an outbreak.

## What is the treatment for Pink Eye?

Your doctor can determine if antibiotic treatment is required for the infection. A warm compress applied to the eyes may help to relieve discomfort, and assist with removing crusts from the eyelids.

## How do I prevent Pink Eye?

- Do not share towels or wash cloths with an infected person.
- Ensure that you and your child wash your hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds after touching or wiping the infected eye.
- Clothes, towels, wash cloths, pillowcases, or anything else used by the person should be washed.

Source: Canadian Paediatric Society - Well Beings a Guide to Health in Child Care, Third Edition 2008; Red Book 2009, 28th Edition, American Academy of Pediatrics

*This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns.*

For further information contact the Infectious Disease Program at  
625-8318 or toll free 1-888-294-6630 ex. 8318

Pink Eye, ID-FS-GEN-409  
February 2016