



Pink Eye Facts for Parents & Teachers

Conjunctivitis, an inflammation of the outermost layer of the eye, is commonly called “pink eye,” although in reality any number of conditions can make the eye look pink or red.

Conjunctivitis can occur in adults, but most often occurs in young children, who are more vulnerable to infection. In fact, pink eye epidemics often spread rapidly through classrooms and day care centers.

In such communal settings you need to take extra precautions to prevent conjunctivitis, such as disinfectant spray use and frequent hand washing.

Types of Conjunctivitis

You should see an eye doctor to determine if your child has conjunctivitis or another ailment. If conjunctivitis is the problem, the way the eyes look and feel will provide clues about which type it is:

- **Viral conjunctivitis** usually affects only one eye, which has excessive watering and a light discharge. Crusting on eyelids sometimes occurs. Viral conjunctivitis is contagious, and like other viruses, antibiotics can't treat it. Unless there's a special reason to do so, eye doctors don't normally prescribe medication for viral conjunctivitis, because usually it clears up on its own in a few days or weeks.
- **Bacterial conjunctivitis** often spreads to both eyes and causes a heavy discharge, sometimes greenish. Crusting may appear on eyelids. Bacterial conjunctivitis is contagious. Antibiotic eye ointments or drops may help eliminate it.
- **Allergic conjunctivitis** causes itching, redness and excessive tearing in both eyes. The nose also may be stuffy, itchy and runny. Allergic conjunctivitis is not contagious; it occurs when irritants such as allergens, dust and smoke are in the environment. Artificial tears may dilute irritants in the eye's tear film, and antihistamine allergy pills or eyedrops also may help control symptoms.

A burning feeling and light sensitivity may also occur. For all types, warm compresses placed on the outside of eyelids and lubricating eyedrops may help eyes feel a little better.

Conjunctivitis is a common and easily treatable problem, which generally has no lasting effects and is not sight-threatening.

How to Prevent the Spread of Pink Eye

Because children are in close contact in day care centers and classrooms, it's difficult to avoid the spread of bacteria and viruses causing pink eye.

Teachers, school nurses and day care supervisors should encourage parents to notify them if a child has pink eye so classrooms and other shared environments can be sanitized.

Parents should minimize exposure by keeping their child with pink eye home until the contagious stage has passed. The child's doctor can advise when the contagious stage has passed, usually three to five days after a diagnosis.

Tips to prevent a pink eye outbreak:

- Wash your hands frequently, and encourage children to do the same. Soap should always be available.
- Never allow personal items, including hand towels, to be shared at school or at home.
- Encourage children to use tissues and cover their mouths and noses when they sneeze or cough.
- Discourage eye rubbing and touching, to avoid spread of bacteria and viruses. Use antiseptic solutions constantly to wipe common toys, table tops, drinking fountains, faucet handles, etc.



This doctor-reviewed information was adapted from www.allaboutvision.com/conditions/conjunctivitis.htm. Please see the article for more complete information.

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