

Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)

What is conjunctivitis? It is a common eye infection or irritation. It can be caused by germs ("infectious conjunctivitis") and often occurs with a cold or ear infection. It can also be caused by allergies (e.g., pollen), chemicals, or irritants (e.g., smoke, make-up, dust). It involves one or both eyes and usually lasts three to five days with:

- Red eyes
- Clear, white, yellow, or green drainage from the eyes Crusty eyelashes when the child wakes up
- Itchy, sore or burning eyes
- Sensitivity to light

How does conjunctivitis spread? Conjunctivitis is contagious only when it is caused by germs ("infectious conjunctivitis"), not by allergies, chemicals, or irritants. It spreads when people:

- Touch infected drainage from the eye, mucus from the nose, or saliva
- Share tissues, towels, and make-up
- Cough and sneeze

When is Conjunctivitis contagious?

- From one to two days *before* the symptoms appear until:
 - 24 hours after antibiotic treatment is started (for bacterial conjunctivitis)
 - The end of drainage from the eyes (for viral conjunctivitis)
- After exposure to conjunctivitis, it usually takes two to three days to develop the infection.

How do I know if my child has conjunctivitis? If you see the symptoms, take your child to the doctor. Conjunctivitis is diagnosed by the signs and symptoms.

What should I do if my child has conjunctivitis?

Treatment: Follow your doctor's recommendations for antibiotic eye drops or ointment. Be sure to use it in both eyes.

Keep your child home: until 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment, and until there is no discharge from the eyes.

To limit the spread:

- Encourage your child not to rub his eyes.
- Have children wash their hands after touching their eyes and nose.
- Wash your hands after touching the child's eyes, applying eye medication, or blowing noses.
- Throw out tissues after use. Don't share tissues or towels.