

CONJUNCTIVITIS (PINKEYE)

Information for School-Aged Children

Conjunctivitis, commonly known as pinkeye, is redness and soreness (inflammation) of the membrane (conjunctiva) that covers the eye and lines the inner surface of the eyelid. Viral conjunctivitis is often found along with the common cold or other mild cold-like illnesses. Bacterial conjunctivitis is uncommon in children older than 5 years of age.

CAUSE: Bacteria, viruses, allergies, eye injuries, or chemicals.

SYMPTOMS: May include redness, itching, pain, and eye discharge depending on the cause. Bacterial conjunctivitis can sometimes be distinguished from other forms of conjunctivitis by a more purulent (white or yellow) eye discharge (pus).

SPREAD: Bacterial and viral infections can be spread by contact with the secretions from the eyes, nose, and mouth, for example, if a person's fingers are contaminated with secretions and then they touch their eyes. Spread can also occur by sharing towels, washcloths, eye makeup (e.g., eyeliner, eye shadow, mascara), multi-dose eye drops or medications, or contact lens solution used by a person with conjunctivitis.

INCUBATION: It takes about 1 to 12 days depending on the organism, usually 1-3 days, after exposure for symptoms to begin.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD: While symptoms are present.

EXCLUSION: Usually no exclusion. Call your healthcare provider if the student has a fever or other symptoms (e.g., pus, eye pain, or eyelid redness). Once antibiotic treatment is started, students may return to school unless they are unable to keep their hands away from their eyes and pose a risk to other students.

DIAGNOSIS: Call your healthcare provider if your child has purulent (pus) eye drainage and/or fever, eye pain, or eyelid redness.

TREATMENT: **Bacterial conjunctivitis:** Antibiotic treatment (eye ointment or drops) may be prescribed.
Viral conjunctivitis: No specific antiviral treatment is usually needed unless a severe infection is present.

PREVENTION/CONTROL:

1. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after contact with eye drainage. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.**
2. Encourage children not to rub eyes. Avoid contact with eye drainage.
3. DO NOT share any articles, such as towels and washcloths, eye makeup (e.g., eyeliner, eye shadow, mascara), contact lens solution, or eye drops.
4. Discard makeup used within 3 days of onset of eye symptoms.
5. DO NOT touch eyes when using eye drops or eye medications.

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PREVENTION/CONTROL CONTINUED:

6. Dispose of used tissues.

For more information, you or your healthcare provider may call Hennepin County Community Health Department at (952) 351-5230, or call your local health department.