

CONJUNCTIVITIS, INFECTIOUS (Pink Eye)

DESCRIPTION

- A bacterial or viral infection of the conjunctiva. The conjunctiva is a clear membrane that covers the white part of the eye and the inside of the eyelids.
- The inflammation causes blood vessels to swell and so the eye looks pink or red. (Thus, “pink eye.”) Conjunctivitis is a very common condition in children.
- Conjunctivitis may occur with other infections such as colds or ear infections.
- Conjunctivitis is contagious. It can spread from one eye to the other. It can also be spread from one person to another.
- Most forms will heal on their own in 1 to 2 weeks with no serious harm.
- Make an appointment to see us if you have any concerns about your symptoms. An exam of the affected eye(s) will confirm the diagnosis of infection of the conjunctiva. Infectious conjunctivitis is not very dangerous, but some conditions that mimic it are.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Redness of the eye
- Eye discomfort or pain
- Clear, green, or yellow discharge from the eye.
- After sleeping, crusts on lashes that cause eyelids to stick together.
- Gritty feeling in the eye (like there is a piece of sand in the eye).
- One or both eyes may be affected

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Contact lens wearers. Do not hesitate to see us if you develop pink eye while wearing contact lenses.
- Newborns of mothers who are carriers of gonorrhea or chlamydia. Newborns with pink eye should be seen right away.

GENERAL MEASURES

- Wash hands often with antiseptic soap, and use paper towels to dry.
- Don't touch the eyes; gently wipe any discharge from the eye using disposable tissues.
- Use warm-water compresses on the eye to reduce discomfort. Apply for 5 to 10 minutes several times a day.
- Do not use eye makeup while symptoms are present.
- Do not wear contact lenses until symptoms are gone. Discard the lenses you were wearing when you became infected.

MEDICATIONS

- You may use nonprescription artificial tears in the eyes to help relieve dryness and irritation.
- For itching and redness, you may use nonprescription medicated eye drops (e.g. Naphcon-A).
- Antibiotic eye drops or ointments may occasionally be prescribed. It is difficult to tell the difference between a viral infection and a bacterial one. Fortunately, your body fights off both types well without antibiotic drops. Occasionally, a severe bacterial infection will require antibiotic drops.
- Antibiotics taken by mouth may be prescribed for very severe cases.

ACTIVITY

Conjunctivitis is contagious as long as the symptoms last. Avoid infecting others by not touching your eyes and washing your hands frequently. Schools might not allow children back into school until the chance of infecting others is gone.

COME IN FOR AN OFFICE VISIT IF YOU EXPERIENCE

- Eyelids “glued” shut in the morning
- Swollen eyelids
- Sensitivity to bright light
- Increasing pain
- Altered vision
- Fever