

Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)

What is Pink Eye?

Pink Eye is an infection that causes redness and swelling of the eyeball and inside of the eyelid.

It is usually caused by a virus or bacteria, but can also be caused by allergies or chemical irritants in the environment.

Pink Eye caused by viruses and bacteria are very contagious, and are common in childcare centres and schools.

What are the symptoms?

It can take 24 to 72 hours for symptoms to appear after coming in contact with infectious Pink Eye.

- Pink Eye usually starts with the white of the eye turning pink or red. The eye is often itchy and can look swollen.
- There may be a lot of watery discharge or pus coming from the eye.
- A thick yellow discharge that can stick the eyelids together may be present after sleeping.

How is it spread?

Pink Eye is directly spread by contact with the eye discharge of someone who is infected.

It can also be spread indirectly through contact with items contaminated with the eye discharge, like toys, tissues, and towels.

What to do?

If you think you have Pink Eye, call your doctor to find out the best way to treat it. A doctor can usually diagnose Pink Eye with an eye examination and by asking questions about your symptoms.

Treatment

- If your doctor thinks the Pink Eye is caused by bacteria, antibiotic eye drops may be prescribed. With antibiotic treatment, symptoms usually go away in 2 to 3 days. Antibiotics only work for Pink Eye caused by bacteria.
- If the Pink Eye is caused by a virus, antibiotics will not be effective treatment. Viral Pink Eye will clear up on its own in about 7 to 10 days.
- Pink Eye caused by an allergy or chemical will not go away until you avoid whatever is causing it. Use allergy eye drops and medicines to reduce symptoms.

Do children with Pink Eye need to be excluded from childcare or school?

If a child has bacterial Pink Eye (infected eye has yellow or green coloured discharge), the child should be excluded. S/he can return after they have completed 24 hours of antibiotic treatment.

Prevention

- **Thorough handwashing** is the way to prevent the spread of infection. Wash hands carefully after touching the eyes.
The best handwashing technique includes 6 steps:
 - **Wet hands** with warm running water
 - **Apply liquid soap**
 - **Lather hands and scrub for 20 seconds**
 - **Rinse** under running water
 - **Dry** your hands with paper towels
 - **Use the towel to turn off the taps**
- **An alcohol-based hand rub can be added to your hand hygiene routine:**
 - **Apply the sanitizer to your hands.** About a thumbnail size amount is sufficient.
 - **Rub your hands together until the alcohol has evaporated.** Hands will feel dry in about 15 seconds.
- **Avoid contact sports, activities that share equipment, and swimming** until the infection has been treated to prevent spread to others.
- **Avoid sharing personal items such as face cloths, towels, pillowcases or make-up.**
Launder any linens that come into contact with infected eyes and throw away any make-up that may have touched infected eyes. Toys can be washed using a mild disinfectant such as a 1:500 household bleach and water solution (approximately 100 ppm). This can be made by mixing 20 ml (4 teaspoons) household bleach with 10 L (40 cups) water.
- **Clean and sanitize** common use areas, especially in schools and child care centres. Follow the disinfectant manufacturer's instructions carefully, and leave the disinfectant on the surface for the minimum amount of time the label advises.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Infectious Disease Control Team at 519-663-5317 ext. 2330 or go to www.healthunit.com

Reference:

Caring for kids. Pinkeye (Conjunctivitis), Retrieved on August 08, 2018 from <http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/pinkeye>

Mayo clinic. *Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)*, Retrieved on August 08, 2018 from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/pink-eye/DS00258>

Date of creation: May 2008

Date of revision: August 8 2018