

Conjunctivitis (Pinkeye)

Conjunctivitis, also referred to as “pinkeye”, is an infection of the covering of the eyeball and the inside of the eyelid. It is usually caused by a virus, but may also be caused by bacteria. It is important to know that there is more than one type of pinkeye. Purulent pinkeye, with a pink or red eyeball, white or yellow discharge, matted or red eyelids and eye pain, is usually caused by a bacterial infection and can be treated with antibiotics. Non-purulent pinkeye, where the eyeball is pink or red, discharge is clear and watery and there is mild or no pain may be caused by a virus or a non-infectious condition. Antibiotics are not effective.

What are the symptoms of pinkeye?

A person with pinkeye will experience a scratchy feeling or pain in his eyes, often with lots of tearing and sensitivity to light. The whites of the eyes are pink or red with swollen eyelids. A discharge may cause eyelids to crust over and stick together during the night.

How is pinkeye spread?

The infection is easily spread through direct or indirect contact. Direct contact occurs when tears or discharge from an infected person’s eyes are touched and transferred by the fingers to the eyes of another person. Indirect contact occurs when an object contaminated with eye fluid (e.g. a used tissue) is touched, or touches another person’s eyes. When pinkeye is associated with a common cold, it is also spread by droplets in a sneeze or cough.

How long is pinkeye contagious?

Pinkeye is contagious during the active infection period and may be highly infectious depending on the cause.

How is pinkeye treated?

If the pinkeye is bacterial it is treated with antibiotics. However, antibiotics are not effective against viral infections.

More to know

- Pinkeye can also be caused by allergies, exposure to chemicals, smoke and other irritants, injury or excessive rubbing.
- If the pinkeye is caused by a bacteria, the child can return to school after an antibiotic has been taken for 24 hours.
- If the pinkeye is caused by a virus, the child can return to school with a doctor’s (or public health) approval. Children with a non-purulent pinkeye don’t need to be excluded unless there is an outbreak at a facility.
- Promotion of proper hand hygiene is very important to prevent the spread of infection.



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