



CONJUNCTIVITIS ("Pink Eye")

What is "pink eye"?

"Pink eye", or conjunctivitis, refers to an infection of white part of the eye and the inner surface of the eyelids (conjunctiva). The eye may be red and swollen with a watery or yellow discharge. Complaints of burning and /or itching are also common.

The three most common types of conjunctivitis are viral, allergic, and bacterial. Each type requires different treatment. Infections caused by a virus or bacteria are typically contagious. Allergic conjunctivitis is not.

Viral conjunctivitis is frequently related to an upper respiratory tract infection, cold or sore throat. Allergic conjunctivitis usually occurs seasonally and may occur with exposure to pollen or dust. Allergies may also be caused by intolerance to certain substances such as perfume, drugs, or cosmetics. Bacterial conjunctivitis is often caused by bacteria such as staphylococcus and streptococcus and requires antibiotic therapy.

It is important to know that a viral or bacterial infection in one eye may spread easily to the other eye. Allergic conjunctivitis usually affects both eyes. However, only a doctor or specially-trained nurse can determine what type of infection is present and prescribe appropriate treatment. Prompt evaluation of any eye infection, especially if associated with pain, change in vision, or a stringy, sticky discharge is important.

How is it spread? How can it be prevented?

"Pink eye" can be spread by fingers, tissues, towels, and handkerchiefs. Family members or other persons in a close environment such as school or day care are at increased risk. There are simple reminders for young children and adults with "pink eye".

- Do not to rub or touch the eye
- Use separate washcloths and towels. Change them daily.
- Change your pillowcase often
- Dispose of soiled or used tissues in waste container.
- Follow your doctor's instructions about eye care/treatment
- Many experts suggest discarding of make-up that is over 6 months old
- Check expiration (use by) dates on contact solutions and over-the-counter eye drops
- Do not share eye cosmetics or eye products
- As always, good handwashing is key to the prevention and control of germs!

For more information:
SCHD Communicable Disease Unit 330- 375-2662
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov
Mayo Clinic www.mayoclinic.com