

# Fact Sheet

## Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)

### Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

Conjunctivitis, also known as “pink eye”, is one of the most common and treatable eye conditions in children and adults. It is an inflammation of the thin, clear lining inside the eyelid and on the white of the eye. This inflammation gives the eye a pink or reddish color.

There are different types of conjunctivitis. Viral conjunctivitis is caused by infection of the eye with a virus. Viral conjunctivitis can be caused by a number of different viruses, many of which are associated with an upper respiratory tract infection, cold, or sore throat. Antibiotics will not improve viral conjunctivitis—these drugs are not effective against viruses. In addition rubella, measles, chickenpox, and Hib disease have conjunctivitis associated as a symptom.

Bacterial conjunctivitis is caused by infection of the eye with certain bacteria.

Allergic conjunctivitis is caused by the body's reaction to certain substances to which it is allergic, such as pollen from trees, plants, grasses, and weeds, dust mites, molds, dander from animals, contact lenses and lens solution, and cosmetics.

Conjunctivitis caused by allergens is not contagious; however, viral and bacterial conjunctivitis can be easily spread from person to person and can cause epidemics. Infection typically occurs through direct contact or through contamination of hands followed by touching the infected eye.

If you think you have conjunctivitis, you should seek medical attention.

If you have conjunctivitis, you should definitely see your health care provider if you develop—

- Moderate to severe pain in your eye(s),
- Blurred vision or increased sensitivity to light,
- Intense redness in the eye(s),
- A weakened immune system, for example, from HIV or cancer treatment,
- Bacterial conjunctivitis that does not improve after 24 hours of antibiotic use, or
- Symptoms persist or get worse.

If you have infectious (viral or bacterial) conjunctivitis, you can help limit its spread to other people by following these steps:

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching or rubbing your eyes.
- Wash any discharge from around the eyes several times a day. Hands should be washed first and then a clean washcloth or fresh cotton ball or tissue can be used to cleanse the eye

area. Throw away cotton balls or tissues after use; if a washcloth is used, it should be washed with hot water and detergent. Wash your hands with soap and warm water when finished.

- Wash hands after applying eye drops or ointment.
- Do not use the same eye drop dispenser/bottle for infected and non-infected eyes—even for the same person.
- Wash pillowcases, sheets, washcloths, and towels in hot water and detergent; hands should be washed after handling such items.
- Avoid sharing articles like towels, blankets, and pillowcases.
- Clean eyeglasses, being careful not to contaminate items (like towels) that might be shared by other people.
- Do not share eye makeup, face make-up, make-up brushes, contact lenses and containers, or eyeglasses.
- Do not use swimming pools.

If you are around someone with infectious (viral or bacterial) conjunctivitis, you can reduce your risk of infection by following these steps:

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and warm water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Wash your hands after contact with an infected person or items he or she uses; for example, wash your hands after applying eye drops or ointment to an infected person's eye(s) or after putting their bed linens in the washing machine.
- Avoid touching or rubbing your eyes.
- Do not share items used by an infected person; for example, do not share pillows, washcloths, towels, eye drops, eye or face makeup, and eyeglasses.
- Clean and handle your contact lenses as instructed by your eye doctor.

In addition, if you have infectious conjunctivitis, there are steps you can take to avoid re-infection once the infection goes away:

- Throw away and replace any eye or face makeup you used while infected.
- Replace contact lens solutions that you used while your eyes were infected.
- Throw away disposable contact lenses and cases that were used while your eyes were infected.
- Clean extended wear lenses as directed.
- Clean eyeglasses and cases that were used while infected.