

# Conjunctivitis (Pinkeye)

Conjunctivitis, often called pinkeye, is a common, easily spread infection. It usually goes away on its own, but treatment can be helpful. Conjunctivitis in newborns can be more serious, requiring medical attention.

## What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis (pinkeye) means inflammation (redness, soreness) of the white part of the eye and the inside of the eyelid. Pinkeye is caused by bacteria or viruses, which can easily spread to others.

 In newborns, conjunctivitis can be caused by bacteria or viruses transmitted during birth. These infections can be more serious and require medical attention.

## What does it look like?

- The white part of one or both eyes is pink or red.
- There is a gritty or “scratchy” feeling in the eye, with little or no pain.
- Eyelids may be swollen but not red or tender.
- Eyes may be mildly sensitive to bright light.
- There may be a clear, green, or yellow discharge from the eye. While your child is sleeping, a crust may develop on his or her eyelashes, causing the eyelids to stick together.

## What causes conjunctivitis?

- Infection with bacteria or viruses. Sometimes this happens when your child has a cold or sore throat.
- Other things can irritate the eye, such as allergies or dust. These are sometimes confused with pinkeye.

## What are the possible complications?

- Children with conjunctivitis may also develop middle-ear infections (otitis media).

## What puts your child at risk of conjunctivitis?

- The bacteria or viruses that cause pinkeye can spread quickly among children. This commonly happens at school or in day care, especially in young children.

## Can conjunctivitis be prevented?

- To avoid spreading the infection, children with pinkeye may not be permitted to go to school or day care.
- Having your child wash his or her hands frequently may help avoid spreading the infection.

## How is conjunctivitis treated?

Pinkeye is caused by bacteria in about half of cases and by viruses in the other half. It can be difficult to tell the two causes apart.

- *If the cause is a virus*, antibiotics won't help. The infection usually goes away on its own in a few days.
- *If the cause is bacteria*, the infection may go away more quickly with the use of antibiotic eye drops. Drops are usually given four times per day for about a week.
- Your child will usually be allowed to go back to school or day care in a day or two.
- Warm or cold water soaks may help the eyes feel better. Use lukewarm water to remove crusty material that builds up on the eyelids.
- Older children and teens should avoid using eye makeup or wearing contact lenses until the eye looks and feels better.

## When should I call your office?

If your child is being treated for conjunctivitis, call our office if he or she develops

- Fever.
- Increased pain.
- Increased sensitivity to light.
- A change in vision.

Also call if conjunctivitis doesn't get better in 1 week.

Conjunctivitis in newborns may be more serious. If your baby develops redness or fluid draining from the eyes anytime before 1 month old, call our office. 