

FACT SHEET

Evaluating, Treating and Preventing Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)

This *WorkCare Fact Sheet* describes symptoms, evaluation, treatment and prevention of conjunctivitis, often referred to as pink eye.

Conjunctivitis is a common condition in which membranes (conjunctiva) lining the eyelids and covering the white part of the eye become inflamed or infected.

Symptoms

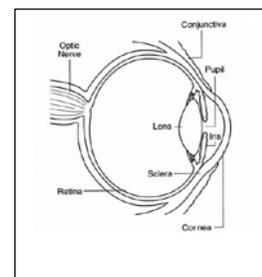
Symptoms may include redness, swelling, burning and discharge from the eyes. Itching is generally associated with allergens. At onset, conjunctivitis is usually painless and does not harm vision.

Evaluation and Treatment

The most common causes of conjunctivitis are bacterial or viral infections and allergens. Other causes include foreign bodies in the eye, air pollution (chemical vapors, fumes, smoke, dust) and certain diseases.

Viral conjunctivitis can be caused by a number of different viruses. They may be associated with an upper respiratory tract

infection, cold or sore throat. It usually begins in one eye and may progress to the second eye within days. It is easily spread from one person to another.



Most cases are mild and usually clear up in 7-14 days without treatment or any long-term effects. Antiviral medication may be prescribed to treat more serious forms of conjunctivitis, but antibiotics are not effective against viruses.

Bacterial conjunctivitis usually begins in one eye and may progress to the second eye. It is a leading cause of children being absent from day care or school. Cases are typically mild and can last as few as 2-3 days or up to 2-3 weeks. Many cases improve in 2-5 days without treatment. However, topical antibiotics (ointment or drops) may be prescribed to treat the infection.

Allergic conjunctivitis is caused by the body's reaction to certain substances such as pollen, dust mites, molds, animal dander,

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A Guide to Healthy Eating



contact lenses and lens solutions, and cosmetics. Allergic conjunctivitis usually occurs in both eyes and tends to affect people with other allergic conditions such as hay fever, asthma or eczema. It clears up when the allergen is removed or treated with allergy medications.

Treatment

Your health care provider may irrigate your eye(s) with an eye wash solution to remove any discharge and instruct you to apply warm compresses for 15 minutes three to four times a day (if non-allergy). You will also be advised to practice good personal hygiene at work and at home. A referral may be recommended if:

- You are diabetic
- There is a foreign body in your eye
- You have been exposed to a chemical
- You have a vision problem, such as sensitivity to light or blurred vision

Prevention

You can greatly reduce risk of contagion by taking the following steps:

1. Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
2. Avoid touching or rubbing your eyes.
3. 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.

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

Resources

1. If you have questions, contact your supervisor or the occupational health experts at WorkCare.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
www.cdc.gov/conjunctivitis/about
3. National Eye Institute:
www.nei.nih.gov