

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)

What You Need to Know

What is Pink Eye?

Pink Eye is an inflammation of the thin layer of membrane that lines the inside of the eyelid and covers the white part of the eye and can be caused by a virus, bacteria or allergic reaction (allergens). Viruses are in the drainage from the eye. Pink eye is easily spread from one eye to the other or to other people by contact with this drainage.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Crusts that form on the eyelid overnight.
- Gritty feeling in the eyes.
- Redness in the eye.
- Sensitivity to light.
- Increased tearing.

How long after exposure before Pink Eye illness appears?

One to three days after exposure

Is there a treatment for Pink Eye?

Yes. The treatment depends on the causes of Pink Eye (conjunctivitis). Most cases of viral conjunctivitis are mild. The infection will usually clear up in 7–14 days without treatment and without any long-term consequences and 2-3 weeks if complication arises. Artificial tears and cold packs may be used to relieve the dryness and inflammation (swelling) caused by conjunctivitis. Antiviral medication can be prescribed by a physician to treat more serious forms of conjunctivitis. Antibiotics can help shorten the illness and reduce the spread of infection to others in cases of bacterial conjunctivitis. Conjunctivitis caused by an allergy usually improves when the allergen (such as pollen or animal dander) is removed. Allergy medications and certain eye drops (topical

antihistamine and vasoconstrictors), including some prescription eye drops, can also provide relief from allergic conjunctivitis. The products are available through your healthcare provider or drugstore. Independence Health Department does not endorse any specific brand or product.

How can get Pink Eye be prevented?

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching or rubbing your eyes.
- Wash any discharge from around the eyes several times a day.
- 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.

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.
- Throw away 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

For more information on Pink Eye, call (816) 325-7204

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