

Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)

What is Pink Eye?

Pink Eye is redness and swelling of the lining of the eyelid and eye surface. It is usually caused by a virus or bacteria. Allergies or chemical irritants in the environment can also cause Pink Eye.

Pink Eye caused by viruses and bacteria are very contagious and are common in childcare centres and schools.

What are the symptoms?

- Pink Eye usually starts with the white of the eye turning pink or red. The eye is often itchy and can look swollen.
- There may be a lot of watery discharge or pus coming from the eye.
- A thick yellow discharge that can stick the eyelids together may be present after sleeping.
- It can take 24 to 72 hours for symptoms to appear after coming in contact with infectious Pink Eye.

How is it spread?

Pink Eye is spread by contact with the eye discharge of someone who is infected. It may also be spread through contact with items contaminated with the eye discharge, like toys, tissues and towels.

What to do?

If you think you have Pink Eye, call your doctor to find out the best way to treat it. A doctor can usually diagnose Pink Eye with an eye examination and by asking questions about your symptoms.

Treatment

- If your doctor thinks the Pink Eye is caused by bacteria, antibiotic eye drops may be prescribed. With antibiotic treatment, symptoms usually go away in 2 to 3 days. Antibiotics only work for Pink Eye caused by bacteria.
- Cases of Pink Eye caused by viruses will clear up on its own. Viral Pink Eye is infectious for a few days and clears in about 7 to 10 days.
- Pink Eye caused by an allergy or chemical will not go away until you avoid whatever is causing it. Use allergy eye drops and medicines to reduce symptoms.

Do children with Pink Eye need to be excluded from childcare or school?

If the infected eye has yellow or green coloured discharge, the child should be excluded. S/he can return after they have completed 24 hours of antibiotic treatment.

Prevention

- **Thorough handwashing** is the way to prevent the spread of infection. Wash hands carefully after touching the eyes.
The best handwashing technique includes 6 steps:
 - **Wet hands** with warm running water
 - **Apply liquid soap**
 - **Lather hands and scrub for 20 seconds**
 - **Rinse** under running water
 - **Dry** your hands with paper towels
 - **Use the towel to turn off the taps**
- **An alcohol-based hand rub can be added to your hand hygiene routine:**
 - **Apply the sanitizer to your hands.** About a thumbnail size amount is sufficient.
 - **Rub your hands together until the alcohol has evaporated.** Hands will feel dry in about 15 seconds.
- **Ensure the person with Pink Eye is treated.**
- **Avoid contact sports, activities that share equipment and swimming** until the infection has been treated to prevent spread to others.
- **Avoid sharing personal items such as face cloths, towels, pillowcases or make-up.** Launder any linens that come into contact with infected eyes and throw away any make-up that may have touched infected eyes.

Toys can be washed using a mild disinfectant such as a 1:500 household bleach and water solution (approximately 100 ppm). This can be made by mixing 20 ml (4 teaspoons) household bleach with 10 L (40 cups) water.
- **Clean and sanitize** common use areas, especially in schools and child care centres. Follow the disinfectant manufacturer's instructions carefully, and leave the disinfectant on the surface for the minimum amount of time the label advises.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Infectious Disease Control Team at 519-663-5317 ext. 2330 or go to www.healthunit.com

Reference:

Mayo clinic. *Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)*, Retrieved on April 15, 2015 from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/pink-eye/DS00258>

Caring for kids. *Pinkeye (Conjunctivitis)*, Retrieved on April 15, 2015 from <http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/pinkeye>

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