



Fact Sheet: Pink Eye

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What is pink eye?

The pink eye is a very contagious infection of the eye and eyelid caused by a bacterium or virus. The pink eye is often called conjunctivitis because it causes the white of the eye (sclera) to turn pink or red in color. Three types of conjunctivitis

1. Viral conjunctivitis-most cases are mild; infection usually clears in 7-14 days without treatment. However, some cases can take two to three weeks or longer. Treatments include antivirals, antibiotics are not effective
2. Bacterial conjunctivitis- increased pus-like discharge, may improve without antibiotics. Often improves in 2 to 5 days but can take 2 weeks to completely heal. Antibiotics used as eye drops and ointments may shorten the length of infection, reduce complications and reduce the spread to others

What are the symptoms of pink eye?

- Pink or red color in the white (sclera) of the eyes
- Red and swollen eyelid
- Pain, burning or itching in the eyes
- Thick yellow drainage from the eye
- Sensitivity to light
- Watery eyes

Symptoms appear 1 to 3 days after being exposed. Generally, the drainage will form a crust over the eye during the night. If only one eye is red and swollen; often, the other eye will also become red and swollen within a few days. Newborns with symptoms of conjunctivitis should be seen by a doctor right away.

How does a person get pink eye?

The germ is found in the yellowish drainage from the eye. It is passed from contact with the tears or discharge from an infected eye.

It can also be passed from one eye to the other by touching the eyes. Pink eye is often associated with an upper respiratory infection such as the common cold.

How is pink eye treated?

- Please see a health care provider for treatment recommendations.
- Be sure to take all medications as prescribed to effectively treat the cause of the pink eye
- If the drainage makes the eyelashes stick together, put a warm wet washcloth on the eye to soften the crusts. Gently wipe the crusts from the eyelashes (repeat as needed)
- Do not scratch or rub the eyes to help prevent making the infection worse and to avoid the spread of the infection to the other eye
- Use a tissue to gently wipe eyes, and then throw it away in a covered wastebasket
- Always wash hands with soap and water after any activity involving contact with your eyes

Do children need to be kept away from school?

Yes. A child with pink eye needs to stay away from others for 24-hours after treatment has begun or until after the drainage from the eye has stopped.

How can pink eye be prevented?

- Hand washing and general cleanliness is the best way NOT to get pinkeye
- Each person in the home should have his or her own towel and washcloth. Be sure to wash towels, washcloths, pillowcases and bedding in hot soapy water

- Keep hands away from the eyes. Avoid rubbing and scratching eyes. Wash hands after applying eye drops.