



# Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)

## What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is inflammation (swelling) of the thin layer that lines the inside of the eyelid and covers the white part of the eye. Conjunctivitis is often called "pink eye" or "red eye" because it can cause the white of the eye to take on a pink or red color.

## What causes conjunctivitis?

The most common causes of conjunctivitis are:

**Viruses**-many may be associated with an upper respiratory tract infection, cold, or sore throat.

**Bacteria** - caused by the infection of the eye with certain bacteria.

**Allergens**- Caused by the body's reaction to certain substances to which it is allergic to.

A doctor can often determine whether conjunctivitis (pink eye) is caused by a virus, bacteria or allergen based on patient history, symptoms, and an examination of the eye

## How is it spread?

Both viral and bacterial types are very contagious. They are usually spread from an infected person to others through:

- close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- the air by coughing and sneezing
- touching an object or surface with germs on it, then touching your eyes before washing your hands

Allergic conjunctivitis is not contagious

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Common symptoms of conjunctivitis include:

- Pink or red color in the white of the eye(s)
- Swelling of the thin layer that lines the white part of the eye and the inside of the eyelid
- Increased tears
- Discharge of pus or mucus
- Itching, irritation, and/or burning
- Feeling like a foreign body is in the eye(s) or an urge to rub the eye(s)
- Crusting of eyelids or lashes, especially in the morning

## Should a person with conjunctivitis stay home from school/work?

Generally children should be excluded from school until prescribed treatment has been given for 24-48 hours or the condition improves. A person should get their doctor's approval before returning to work or school.

## How can conjunctivitis be prevented?

Practice good hygiene to control the spread:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water
- Don't touch your eyes with your hands.
- Use a clean towel and washcloth daily.
- Don't share towels or washcloths.
- Change your pillowcases often.
- Don't share eye cosmetics or personal eye care items.
- To prevent re-infection do not re-use eye cosmetics, or personal eye care items that you used when you were infected.

Adapted from: "Conjunctivitis" Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021

<https://www.cdc.gov/conjunctivitis/clinical.html>

(Accessed 8 March 2023)

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