

Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)

Pink eye, also known as conjunctivitis, is inflammation (i.e., redness, swelling) of the thin tissue covering the white part of the eye and the inside of the eyelids. There are several different kinds of pink eye:

- Bacterial
- Viral
- Allergic
- Conjunctivitis caused by irritants

Bacterial, viral, and allergic are the most common types of pink eye

Transmission

Pink eye can affect anyone and can be contracted more than once. Pink eye can be spread by:

- **Person to person** through direct close contact such as touching or shaking hands.
- **Environment to person** by touching a contaminated object or surface, then touching your eyes before washing your hands or through the air by coughing or sneezing.

The length of time a person can spread pink eye depends on the type of pink eye:

- **Bacterial**- until medications have started.
- **Viral**- while signs and symptoms are present.

Conjunctivitis caused by allergies and conjunctivitis caused by irritants are not contagious.

Symptoms

The most common symptom is swelling and redness. Other symptoms may occur depending on the cause.

Bacterial

- Commonly associated with discharge (pus), which can lead to eyelids sticking together.
- May occur with an ear infection.

Viral

- May occur with symptoms of a cold, flu, or other respiratory infection.
- Usually starts in one eye but may spread to the other within days.
- Discharge from the eye is usually watery rather than thick.

Allergic

- May occur with symptoms of allergies, such as an itchy nose, sneezing, a scratchy throat, or asthma.
- Can produce intense itching and excessive tearing.
- Usually occurs in both eyes.

Conjunctivitis from irritants

- May produce watery eyes and mucus discharge.

Diagnosis

Consult a health care professional for a positive diagnosis and to determine the type of pink eye.

Treatment

Most cases of pink eye are mild and go away without treatment in seven to 14 days. For more serious forms of pink eye, consult a health care provider for treatment. Treatment may reduce the length of infection, reduce complications, and prevent the spread to others.

Bacterial:

- **Antibiotics**- this is the only type of pink eye that is treated by antibiotics, usually in the form of eye drops or ointment.

Viral:

- **Antiviral Medications**- a doctor may prescribe this type of medication to treat more serious forms of pink eye.

Allergic:

- **Allergy medications.**
- **Eye Drops** such as topical antihistamines and vasoconstrictors.

For more information about the treatment of pink eye contact your health care provider or visit, [Pink Eye \(Conjunctivitis\) | CDC](#).

Prevention

- **Wash hands** before and after touching the eyes, mouth, and nose.
- **Avoid touching or rubbing your eyes.** This can worsen the condition or spread it to your other eye.
- **Sanitize objects** that are commonly touched by faces or hands.
- **Wash discharge from around your eye(s)** several times a day.
- **Do not use the same eye drop dispenser/bottle** for your infected and non-infected eyes.
- **Stop wearing contact lenses** until your eye doctor says it is okay to start wearing them again.
- **Do not share personal items**, such as pillows, washcloths, towels, or makeup.

Exclusion Guidance

Individuals with pink eye should not be excluded from work, school, or child care unless the [general exclusions apply](#).

For additional information about pink eye, contact the North Dakota Health and Human Services' Division of Public Health at 800.472.2180.

Resources:

1. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, November 12). CDC- *Conjunctives (Pink Eye)*. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved March 30, 2023, from <https://cdc.gov/conjunctivitis/index.html>
2. Kimberlin, D. W., Barnett, E. D., Lynfield, R. Saywer, M. H. (2021) *Red Book: 2021-2024 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 31st ed. American Academy of Pediatrics [Management and Prevention of Infectious Diseases] [pages 123-133].

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