

Conjunctivitis (Pinkeye)

Dear Parent or Guardian,

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

- Because you or your child may have been exposed to conjunctivitis (pinkeye).
 - For informational purposes only.
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General Information About Conjunctivitis (Pinkeye)

What is conjunctivitis?

- Conjunctivitis is a common eye infection in children. It is also called pinkeye. It is an inflammation of the thin, clear lining inside the eyelid and on the white area of the eye. It can be caused by bacteria, viruses, and allergens (like pet dander or dust mites), or chemical irritants.
 - Only viral and bacterial conjunctivitis spread easily.
 - Allergic and chemical conjunctivitis do not spread from person to person and are not the focus of this notification letter.
- Bacterial conjunctivitis is most common in December through April.

Who can get it?

Anyone can get conjunctivitis. Bacterial conjunctivitis is more common in older infants and children than viral conjunctivitis.

What are the symptoms?

- Bacterial:
 - Red or pink, itchy painful eye(s).
 - More than a tiny amount of green or yellow fluid.
 - Eyelids may be stuck together after sleeping.
 - May occur in one or both eyes.
- Viral:
 - Pink, swollen, watering eye(s).
 - Eyes may be sensitive to light.
 - May only affect one eye.
 - There may be other symptoms such as a runny nose, sore throat, and earache.

How is it spread?

- The bacteria and viruses that cause conjunctivitis are found in the fluid of an infected person's eye.
- The most common way it is spread is by touching the eyes with unwashed hands after touching an object or surface that has the virus or bacteria on it.
- The viruses that cause conjunctivitis can also be found in droplets from coughs, sneezes, and runny noses.
- It can also spread:
 - Through close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands.
 - Sharing personal items that come in close contact with the eye, such as towels, washcloths, makeup, or glasses.

- When a person who has viral conjunctivitis coughs or sneezes and another person breathes in the droplets.

How Do I Know If My Child Has Conjunctivitis?

A healthcare provider can diagnose conjunctivitis by checking a person's eyes.

If you have additional questions or are concerned your child has conjunctivitis, contact your healthcare provider. This fact sheet provides general information only.

What If My Child Has Conjunctivitis?

Notify your child care provider or preschool immediately if your child has conjunctivitis.

How is it treated?

A healthcare provider can determine the best treatment, depending on the cause of the conjunctivitis.

- **Bacterial** conjunctivitis is treated with antibiotics. Symptoms generally improve 2-3 days after starting treatment.
- **Viral** conjunctivitis will not improve with antibiotics.

How can I help prevent conjunctivitis from spreading?

- Wash hands frequently and for at least 20 seconds. If soap and warm water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol to clean hands.
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Throw away cotton balls or tissues used to clean the fluid from eyes and wash your hands with soap and warm water afterward.
- Thoroughly clean objects commonly touched by hands or faces, such as doorknobs, telephones, and toys.
- Any pillowcases, sheets, washcloths, and towels used by the person with conjunctivitis should be washed with hot water and detergent, in a separate load from other people's laundry.
- Avoid sharing personal items, such as towels, washcloths, glasses, and makeup with a person who has conjunctivitis.

Does My Child Need to Stay Home from Child Care?

No. Children who have been exposed to, or have been diagnosed with, conjunctivitis can continue to attend child care **unless**:

- They have a fever (temperature of 100.4°F [38°C] or higher) along with other viral conjunctivitis symptoms (runny nose, sore throat, earache).
- They do not feel well enough to participate in classroom activities (for example: unusually tired; cranky or fussy; or crying more than normal).

Please follow your child care program's sickness policy. Child care programs may require individuals with eye discharge to stay home from child care until the drainage is gone or until the child has been evaluated by a healthcare professional.

References:

American Academy of Pediatrics

- *Caring for our Children, Chapter 3 Health Promotion and Protection, 3.6 Management of Illness, 3.6.1 Inclusion/Exclusion Due to Illness*
- *Caring for Our Children Standard 7.5.1.1: Conjunctivitis (Pinkeye)*
- *Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools, 5th Edition. Pages 141-142*

Centers of Disease Control & Prevention

- *Conjunctivitis website <https://www.cdc.gov/conjunctivitis/index.html>*

Child Care Health Program – Public Health Seattle & King County

- *<https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/child-teen-health/child-care-health/disease-prevention.aspx>.
Disease Prevention Website*