

FACTS ABOUT CONJUNCTIVITIS

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is a common eye infection in children. It is commonly called pinkeye or red eye.

What causes conjunctivitis?

Many things can cause conjunctivitis including bacteria, viruses, allergies, chemical irritants, or fungal infections. Bacterial conjunctivitis is more common in older infants and children than viral conjunctivitis. It is important to know the cause of the conjunctivitis to provide the correct treatment.

What are the symptoms of conjunctivitis?

Symptoms of conjunctivitis include itching and burning of the eyes, discharge from the eyes, eyelids that stick together, and swollen eyelids. The white area of the eye (conjunctiva) appears red. If a virus causes the conjunctivitis, there may be other symptoms such as a runny nose, sore throat, and earache.

In bacterial conjunctivitis, symptoms occur 1-3 days after exposure. The disease may last from 2 days to 2 weeks. If the conjunctivitis is part of an allergic reaction or from a chemical exposure, it occurs directly after exposure. Symptoms of viral conjunctivitis occur 5-14 days after exposure. People with viral conjunctivitis may be communicable for up to 14 days after the start of the symptoms.

Symptoms that are NOT typically associated with conjunctivitis include changes in vision, eye pain, and being sensitive to light. See a medical provider if these symptoms are present.

How is conjunctivitis spread?

Bacterial and viral conjunctivitis can be very contagious. Bacterial and viral conjunctivitis is spread directly and indirectly through contact with discharges from the eye or upper respiratory tract of an infected individual. Touching one's eye with unwashed hands is a common route for viruses and bacteria to enter the eye. Sharing personal items that come in close contact with the eye, such as makeup or swimming goggles, can spread the infection.

Who is at risk for conjunctivitis?

Any person who comes in contact with the discharge from an infected eye is at risk for conjunctivitis. Infections occur at any age. Also, people living in close quarters may be more likely to become exposed.

How is conjunctivitis diagnosed?

The diagnosis of conjunctivitis is made through direct observation of the infected eyes.

-more-

How is conjunctivitis treated?

Bacterial conjunctivitis is treated with antibiotics. Symptoms generally improve 2-3 days after starting treatment. Viral conjunctivitis does not respond to antibiotics and is treated with cool, wet compresses.

How is the spread of conjunctivitis reduced?

1. Avoid sharing towels and personal items, such as makeup, with a person who has conjunctivitis.
2. Using good handwashing techniques can reduce transmission of conjunctivitis.
3. Use a sanitizing solution (1/4 teaspoon of bleach per quart of cool water) on toys and surfaces.
4. Dispose of facial tissues properly and teach children to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when they cough or sneeze or cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve, not their hands.

Exclude from group setting?

It is recommended that individuals with yellow eye discharge and pink or red conjunctiva be excluded from school or child care until the drainage is gone or until the person has taken antibiotics for 24-48 hours.

Handwashing

Handwashing is one of the primary ways to stop the spread of disease. The following steps are recommended for good handwashing:

1. Turn on warm water.
2. Apply soap to hands.
3. Rub soap over tops and palms of hands and around fingernails. Scrub hands for approximately 20 seconds.
4. Rinse hands with running water.
5. Dry hands with a clean, disposable towel.
6. Repeat the process if preparing foods.

Conjunctivitis_factsheet_rev_110411cdos

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant as a substitute for consultation with your health care provider. These fact sheets are reviewed annually. This document is not valid after 06/2012.