

CONJUNCTIVITIS (PINK EYE)



What is Conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis begins with excess tearing and irritation of the eye, usually pink/red in color, and 'sticky'. It may be followed by swelling of the eyelids, photophobia and white/yellow discharge (pus). It can be due to a viral or bacterial infection. Pink eye due to allergies are often associated with other signs of hay fever such as itchy nose and is not contagious and do not have pus.

How is it spread?

It is spread by contact with discharge from the eyes or upper respiratory tracts of infected persons, from contaminated fingers, clothing and other articles including shared eye makeup applicators.

What is the incubation period and how long is it communicable?

The incubation period is 24 to 72-hours but it may vary depending on the cause. Bacterial infections can be treated with antibiotics and are no longer contagious 24 hours after beginning of treatment. Viral infections are communicable as long as symptoms are present and no treatment is currently available.

How can conjunctivitis be prevented?

Anyone with symptoms of conjunctivitis or anyone in contact with someone with conjunctivitis should wash hands before and after touching or wiping your eyes with soap and water, throw away or carefully wash items that touch the eyes, do not share eye make-up or other items used on the eyes (towels, tissues, or cotton ball). Adults and children should be encouraged to sneeze or cough in a tissue or their elbows and dispose of used tissue into a waste basket. It is recommended to use spray bottles to apply the disinfectant (1 part bleach to 9 parts cool water; prepared daily) to contaminated surfaces such as door handles or any object the sick individual has touched.

What should I do about it?

If the eye discharge is yellow, if the eye or eyelid is red, or if symptoms don't start improving after two (2) or three (3) days, please seek medical attention. Be aware of the signs of more severe eye infection: severe eye pain, change in vision, extreme sensitivity to light, and marked heat and swelling of the eyelids. If any of these symptoms occur, contact your healthcare provider IMMEDIATELY!

Children and sensitive workers can NOT attend school/childcare until drainage is no longer present or 24 hours after beginning antibiotic treatment for bacterial conjunctivitis. The SRCHD Epidemiology Program may change exclusion rules at any time.

Clusters of two or more persons are considered a reportable disease to the Santa Rosa County Health Department (SRCHD).

For more information, please contact the SRCHD's Epidemiology department at 850-983-5200.