

PINKEYE

What is pinkeye?

Pinkeye, or conjunctivitis, is an inflammation of the conjunctiva (the outermost layer of the eye and the inner surface of the eyelids). It is most commonly due to an infection (usually viral, but sometimes bacterial), an allergic reaction or as a result of a chemical eye injury.

What are the symptoms of pinkeye?

Pinkeye may be present for three days before symptoms appear. Common symptoms include red eye, irritation, and watering of the eyes.

Viral conjunctivitis is often related to an infection of the upper respiratory tract, a common cold, and/or a sore throat. Its symptoms include watery discharge and variable itch. The infection usually begins with one eye, but may spread easily to the other eye.

Bacterial conjunctivitis is due to common pus-producing bacteria that causes irritation of the eye and a stringy, opaque, greyish or yellowish discharge that may cause the eyelids to stick together, especially after sleeping. There may also be severe crusting of the infected eye and the surrounding skin. The infection usually begins with one eye, but may spread easily to the other eye.

Chemical eye injury is due to either an acidic or alkali substance getting in the eye. Mild burns will produce conjunctivitis while more severe burns may cause the cornea to turn white.

How does pinkeye spread?

Both viral and bacterial pinkeye are contagious. It is spread through direct contact with the discharge from an infected eye and/or from direct contact with a contaminated surface. Pinkeye is commonly spread from fingers, face cloths, towels, bedding, and toys. An infected person can give pinkeye to another person two to three days before their own symptoms appear. Be sure to watch your child for signs of pinkeye if another child has it.

How can pinkeye be prevented?

There is no vaccine to prevent pinkeye. The most effective method of preventing pinkeye is frequent hand washing.

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How is pinkeye treated?

Generally, pinkeye resolves on its own without treatment in two to five days. However, if it is caused by bacteria, and there is no improvement after three days, you may need antibiotics, eye drops or ointment. Antibiotics may also stop the infection from spreading to others.

There is no treatment for pinkeye that is caused by a virus.

If you suspect pinkeye:

- Contact your doctor. It is not easy to tell whether the infection is caused by a bacteria or a virus. It may be necessary for the doctor to prescribe antibiotics
- It is very important to take all of the medication given by the doctor even when symptoms disappear
- Wash hands frequently and thoroughly, especially after touching or wiping the affected eye
- Do not share towels or washcloths with anyone else as this may spread the infection
- Wash bed linens and washcloths daily until all redness and pus discharge has disappeared from the eyes
- If the eyes have a pus discharge (yellow or thick), the affected person should not go to a child care facility, school or work until the medication has been taken for one full day
- Avoid swimming until the eyes are healed