

Fact Sheet

Conjunctivitis

(Also known as: Pinkeye)

What is Conjunctivitis?



Conjunctivitis is a common eye condition worldwide. It causes inflammation (swelling) of the conjunctiva, the thin layer that lines the inside of the eyelid and covers the white part of the eye. Conjunctivitis is often called "pink eye" or "red eye" because it can cause the white of the eye to take on a pink or red color.

Causes

The most common causes of conjunctivitis are viruses, bacteria, and allergens. But there are other causes, including chemicals, fungi, certain diseases, and contact lens wear (especially wearing lenses overnight). The conjunctiva can also become irritated by foreign bodies in the eye and by indoor and outdoor air pollution caused, for example, by chemical vapors, fumes, smoke, or dust.

Signs and Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of Conjunctivitis may vary depending on the cause, but they usually include:

- § Redness or swelling of the white of the eye or inside the eyelids
- § Increased amount of tears
- § White, yellow, or green eye discharge
- § Itchy eyes
- § Burning eyes
- § Increased sensitivity to light
- § Gritty feeling in the eye
- § Crusting of the eyelids or lashes

Diagnosis

Conjunctivitis has many causes, but in most cases it results from infection with a virus or bacterium or from a reaction to an allergen. No matter the cause, conjunctivitis always involves inflammation of the thin layer that lines the inside of the eyelid and covers the white part of the eye (the conjunctiva). But conjunctivitis also has other signs and symptoms, which may vary, depending on the cause. These signs and symptoms can be used to diagnose the type of conjunctivitis.

Treatment

The treatment for conjunctivitis depends on the cause. It is not always necessary to see a healthcare provider for conjunctivitis. For bacterial conjunctivitis, antibiotics can help shorten the illness and reduce the spread of infection to others. Many topical antibiotics (drugs given as eye drops or ointment) are effective for treating bacterial conjunctivitis. Your healthcare provider may prescribe antibiotic eye drops or ointment as conjunctivitis treatment, and the infection should clear within several days. Artificial tears and cold compresses may be used to relieve some of the dryness and inflammation. Conjunctivitis caused by an allergy usually improves when the allergen (such as pollen or animal dander) is removed. Cases of viral conjunctivitis will usually clear up in 7–14 days without treatment and without any long-term consequences.



Prevention

Conjunctivitis caused by allergens is not contagious; however, viral and bacterial conjunctivitis can be easily spread from person to person and can cause epidemics. A person can greatly reduce the risk of getting conjunctivitis or of passing it on to someone else by following some simple good hygiene steps. A person with infectious (viral or bacterial) conjunctivitis can help limit its spread to other people by following these steps:

- § Wash hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- § Avoid touching or rubbing eyes.
- § Wash any discharge from around the eyes several times a day. Hands should be washed first and then a clean washcloth or fresh cotton ball or tissue can be used to cleanse the eye area. Throw away cotton balls or tissues after use; if a washcloth is used, it should be washed with hot water and detergent. Wash hands with soap and warm water when done.
- § Wash hands after applying eye drops or ointment.
- § Do not use the same eye drop dispenser/bottle for infected and non-infected eyes, even for the same person.
- § Wash pillowcases, sheets, washcloths, and towels in hot water and detergent; hands should be washed after handling such items.
- § Avoid sharing articles like towels, blankets, and pillowcases.
- § Clean eyeglasses, being careful not to contaminate items (like towels) that might be shared by other people.
- § Do not share eye makeup, face make-up, make-up brushes, contact lenses and containers, or eyeglasses.
- § Do not use swimming pools.

In addition there are steps you can take to avoid re-infection once the infection goes away:

- § Throw away and replace any eye or face makeup used while infected.
- § Throw away contact lens solutions or any other type of over-the-counter eye drops that were used while eyes were infected.
- § Throw away disposable contact lenses and cases that were used while eyes were infected.
- § Clean extended wear lenses as directed.
- § Clean eyeglasses and cases that were used while infected.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES www.michigan.gov/mdhhs

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov

