

Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)

WHAT IS IT? Conjunctivitis (Pinkeye) is an infection or irritation of the eye. It can be caused by a variety of bacteria and viruses, often accompanying a respiratory illness (e.g., cold or ear infection). It can also be caused by chemicals (e.g., smoke, makeup), allergies (e.g., pollen), and other irritants (e.g. dust). Conjunctivitis causes redness of the whites of the eyes and watery eyes. It can also cause yellowish or greenish discharge from the eyes, and crusty eyelashes when the child wakes up. Children might complain of a gritty or itchy feeling in the eyes and sensitivity to light. Conjunctivitis can begin in one eye but usually ends up involving both eyes. The symptoms typically last for 3 to 5 days.

HOW IS IT SPREAD? Infectious conjunctivitis (i.e. caused by bacterial or virus) is spread by contact with secretions from the eye, nasal mucus and saliva. It can spread through droplets coughed or sneezed into the air and secretions on hands, tissues, linens and makeup.

WHEN IS IT CONTAGIOUS? Infectious conjunctivitis starts to be contagious a day or two before the symptoms appear. If it is caused by a bacterium, it stays contagious until 24 hours after antibiotic treatment is started. If it is caused by a virus, it stays contagious until there is no discharge from the eyes.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED AND TREATED? Children with conjunctivitis should be seen by their health care provider. The health care provider might prescribe antibiotic eye drops or ointment to treat infectious conjunctivitis.

SHOULD THE CHILD STAY HOME? A child with infectious conjunctivitis should stay home until 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment and until there is no discharge from the eyes.

HOW CAN WE LIMIT THE SPREAD?

- Encourage children not to rub their eyes. Have children wash their hands after touching their eyes and nose.
- Use disposable tissues and paper towels. Do not share handkerchiefs, washcloths, hand towels or bed linen.
- Wash your hands well after touching the child's eyes, applying eye medication and blowing noses.