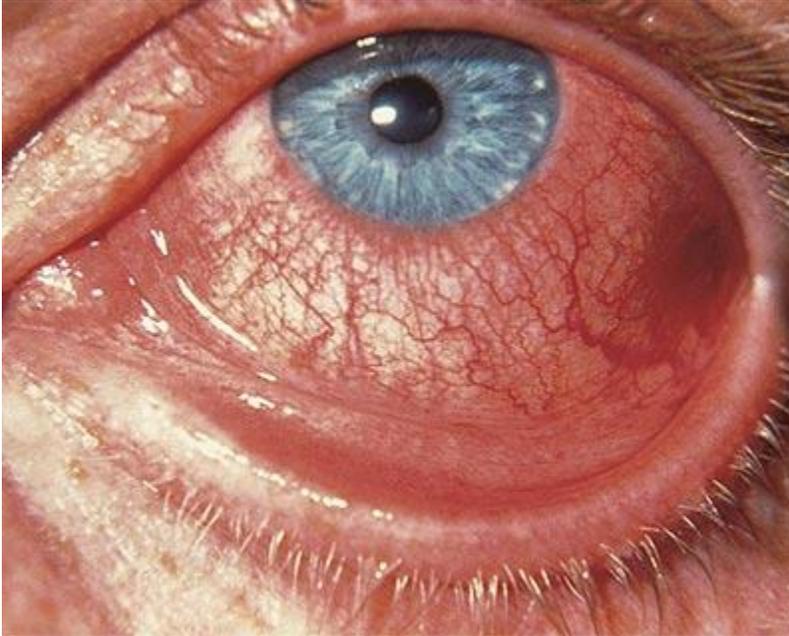


Infectious Conjunctivitis (Pinkeye)

Infectious conjunctivitis makes the eyes red, inflamed, watery and itchy. Treatments include cold compresses and artificial tears.



(photo from the American Academy of Ophthalmology)

The conjunctiva is the clear membrane that covers your eyeball and the inside of your eyelids. Conjunctivitis occurs when something irritates this layer. Irritation can make your eyes red, inflamed, watery and itchy. Though conjunctivitis can sometimes be caused by non-infectious conditions, this article will focus on infectious conjunctivitis.

Most cases of infectious conjunctivitis are caused by viruses. Much less commonly, they can be caused by a bacterial infection. Viral pinkeye typically goes away on its own in 7 to 10 days. It is important to wash your hands frequently as it is easy to spread it to others.

Causes.

Most cases of infectious conjunctivitis are caused by viral infections. Your eye doctor typically sees this as having a “cold” that involves the eye. When you see your medical doctor with symptoms of a sore throat, cough, and runny nose, the doctor often diagnoses you with a cold. Antibiotics are typically not prescribed. Antibiotics work great for bacterial infections, but they do not help viral infections that cause colds and most eye infections.

Symptoms of viral conjunctivitis include:

- Redness
- Some eyelid swelling
- Watery or light-colored discharge
- Eye irritation
- Swelling of the conjunctiva - the clear membrane that covers the white part of the eye
- Light sensitivity and blurred vision. This is uncommon.

Treatment.

Treatment options will depend on the cause of the irritation.

Viral infections often get worse for the first several days, before slowly improving over the course of 7-10 days. They behave very much like a cold. Unfortunately, there is no treatment that immediately cures the condition. As with a cold, treat your symptoms at home while the virus runs its natural course. There are several things you can do to make your eyes more comfortable:

- **Use a cold compress.** Place a cold wet cloth on your eyes a few times a day if they are uncomfortable.
- **Apply artificial tears** every 2-4 hours.
- **Avoid contacts.** Don't wear contact lenses or eye makeup until pinkeye is gone.

In rare instances, viral infections can cause inflammation in the cornea. If this occurs, we may prescribe anti-inflammatory eye drops.

If you have a bacterial infection we may prescribe an antibiotic eye drop. Bacterial infections cause a thick yellow or green discharge. If you have recently been diagnosed with any sexually transmitted disease, please tell us. These infections can contribute to an eye infection.

Don't spread the infection.

Another important part of treatment is to avoid spreading the infection to the other eye or to someone else. The infection is not spread through the air, but it is contagious through touch. Wiping the infected eye with a tissue and using the same tissue on the other eye can spread the infection. Someone coming in contact with your eye secretions can also get the infection. To prevent spreading the infection:

- Wash your hands frequently, especially after touching your eyes.
- Avoid shaking hands.
- Avoid sharing your face towel, bath towel or pillowcase at home with anyone.
- Don't get too close. You may want to minimize your exposure to children to prevent spreading the infection.

You are no longer contagious when the eye is no longer red and watery.

Using eye drops.

If you are using prescription eye drops or artificial tears, here are some tips on using eye drops:

- Make sure the dropper or bottle tip is clean and does not touch the eye, eyelid, lashes, or any surface.
- For eyedrops, tilt the head back and pull the lower eyelid down with one finger. Drop the medicine inside the lower lid
- For ointment, pull down on the lower lid with one finger and squirt a small amount along the inside of the lid.

Close the eye for 30 to 60 seconds to let the medicine absorb.

To prevent pink eye from recurring, or passing it on to others:

- Wash your hands regularly. Always wash them before and after you treat your pinkeye or touch your eyes.
- Don't share towels, pillows, or washcloths while you have pinkeye.
- Throw out eye makeup after an eye infection.
- Clean your contacts and storage case.