

## ***PINK EYES, RED EYES - How to help your child with conjunctivitis***

### ***What is conjunctivitis?***

Conjunctivitis is a medical term that describes an inflammation or irritation of the eyes – especially the whites of the eyes and the linings of the eyelids. A child with conjunctivitis usually has “red eyes” because of the increased blood vessels seen on the whites of the eyes. It is important to remember that there are several different diseases that can cause children to have “red eyes”. So, not all children with “red eyes” have conjunctivitis. Any child who has red eyes for over 1 week or who has changes in vision associated with red eyes should be seen by a physician.

### ***What causes conjunctivitis?***

Conjunctivitis can be caused by germs such as viruses and bacteria. “Pink eye” is the term often used to describe children who have conjunctivitis caused by germs.

Conjunctivitis can also be caused by allergies (dust, pollens) and irritants such as shampoos, chlorine in swimming pools, and cigarette smoke. This is usually referred to as allergic conjunctivitis.

### ***How can we tell what is causing my child’s red eye?***

If your child has recently been exposed to an irritant like those listed above and his eyes are very itchy and watery, it is possible that your child’s red eye is due to an allergy or irritant.

If your child has recently had a cold or upper respiratory infection, it is more likely that the conjunctivitis is caused by a germ such as a virus or bacteria. It is very difficult to tell the difference between a viral infection and a bacterial infection in a child’s eye. Children younger than 3 years of age are more likely to have bacterial infections. Children with ear infections at the same time as conjunctivitis are also more likely to have bacterial infections.

Although it is possible to send a specimen of the eye discharge to the lab to help determine whether the infection is caused by a virus or bacteria, this is not usually practical. Most of the symptoms of conjunctivitis will often disappear before the culture results are available.

### ***What symptoms does infectious conjunctivitis (“pink eye”) cause?***

Conjunctivitis can cause:

Increased tearing	Yellow or green discharge from the eyes
Crusting of the eyelids	Itchy eyes
Burning eyes	Blurred vision because of the discharge
Increased sensitivity to sunlight	Mild pinkness of eyelids

### ***How can I help my child who has conjunctivitis?***

Because it is often difficult to tell the difference between a viral and a bacterial eye infection, pediatricians often prescribe antibiotic eye drops or ointments for children with conjunctivitis. If your child has been given a prescription, please use the eye medicine as directed.

You can use a soft washcloth to wipe away the mucous or eye discharge. Wipe the eye beginning at the side closest to your child's nose and wipe outwards toward the child's ear.

Eye infections are very contagious, so it is important to:

- Wash your child's hands frequently
- Wash your hands frequently – and have everyone in your family do the same
- Do not share towels or wash cloths with the person who has the eye infection
- Do not share bed linens, pillow cases with the person who has the eye infection
- Wash all towels, washcloths, bed linens in hot water
- Do not share the eye medicine with other people in the family
- Wash your hands after applying the eye medicine to your child's eyes

For older patients:

- Do not share cosmetics, eye make up or mascara
- Do not wear contact lenses when eyes are red
- Contact lens wearer should always contact their eye doctor if red eyes occur

### ***Can my child go to day care / school?***

Since conjunctivitis (“pink eye”) is contagious, most daycares and schools do not allow children with eye infections to attend. Some schools will allow children to attend if they are receiving antibiotic eye drops – even though the medicine will not treat all eye infections. Please check with your child's daycare or school.

### ***When should I worry?***

Please call us or come in for an urgent care visit if:

- Your child's red eye has not resolved in 7 – 10 days
- Your child is complaining of severe eye pain
- Your child is complaining of a problem with vision that is not helped when you remove the mucous from the eye
- Eyelids become so puffy that the eye cannot open
- Redness of eyelids that extends on to the cheek or forehead

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