



PINK-EYE (CONJUNCTIVITIS)

WHAT IS PINK-EYE?

Pink-eye is sometimes called conjunctivitis (con-*junk* tiv *eye* tiss). It is an infection of the surface of the eyeball and the inside of the eyelid. There are several causes of pink-eye. Usually it is an infection from a virus or bacteria. But pink-eye can also be caused by an allergy, by air pollution, or by rubbing the eyes too much. Pink-eye is a common childhood disease. It spreads to other people very easily.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Pink-eye usually makes the whites of the eyes turn pink or red. It often causes discomfort in the eyes, including a feeling of “grittiness,” burning, or itching. There may also be a lot of tears and pus in the eyes. If there is pus, this will often make the eyelids stick together when the person wakes up after a sleep. A cloth dipped in warm water and applied gently to the affected area will help remove any crusty discharge.

IS PINK-EYE DANGEROUS?

Pink-eye is a mild infection. It is not a serious threat to health. It will often clear up by itself in a week or ten days. Sometimes, pink-eye can turn into a more dangerous infection. Consult your family doctor if symptoms of pink-eye last for more than three days. Your doctor will know if anything is wrong, and may prescribe antibiotic eye drops or ointment. If your child has pink-eye, your doctor can tell if your child can return to school or daycare, or should stay home (usually for one to three days). Your child may need to stay home until an antibiotic has been taken for a full day, or until the symptoms (discharge, pain) improve.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

This infection spreads very easily. Most often it is spread by hand, after the hand has been in contact with the infected area. One person with pink-eye can easily infect several family members within a few days. It is often passed on when the person touches the pus or discharge from the eye and then touches someone else. It is also spread by touching someone with the infection and then touching your own eye. Adults who wipe an infected child’s eyes can also pass on the disease if they are not careful about washing their hands after contact. It can also spread from close, face-to-face contact, like when a parent “snuggles” a baby.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Pink-eye can be highly infectious, so it is important for your child and everyone else in your family to follow strict hygiene practices for up to ten days after the pink-eye has been diagnosed, or as long as the eye is red. Here are some good rules to follow:

- Don’t rub or touch the infected eye. If only one eye is infected, be extra careful not to touch the other eye. Wash your hands right away after touching the person’s eyes or face.
- Wash your hands with soap several times daily.
- Any discharge from an infected eye should be washed out twice a day. Use a damp facial tissue. Wipe outward with a single stroke, starting at the side near the nose. Blot dry with a new tissue. Be careful not to touch the uninfected eye.
- Use paper towels instead of wash cloths and towels for washing and drying the hands and face. If you can’t do this, make sure others do not use the infected person’s cloth towels and face cloths.
- Wash all infected towels, face cloths and bed linens separately from the family’s other laundry. Use detergent and the hottest water setting. Boiling them is even better.
- A person with pink-eye should not use contact lenses or eye makeup until their eye is free of redness, irritation and any discharge. Once the infection has gone, make sure the contact lenses and lens case have been carefully cleaned before using them again.

TAKING THE MEDICINE

If your doctor prescribes antibiotic drops or ointment, here are some tips on how to use them:

- For **eye drops**, gently pull down on the lower eyelid to form a “pocket.” This will help catch the drops and prevent any being wasted. Another way is to apply the drops right onto the white of the eye, as this part of the eye is less sensitive than the pupil and the coloured portion.
- You should only need one drop at a time. Keep your eye drops in the fridge, so the coolness will let the person know right away if the drop is reaching the eyeball.
- After the drop has been put in, keep the eyelid closed for a minute or two without blinking. This helps the medicine work.
- **Ointment** is harder to put directly onto the eyeball. Instead, put the ointment on the eyelashes. It will eventually melt and reach the eye. (This works best when you are trying to put ointment into the eyes of children and they are being fussy.)

For additional information, contact your regional Public Health office or your family doctor.