

# Conjunctivitis (Pink eye)

This fact sheet helps you know what is normal and what you can expect to happen if you suffer from conjunctivitis, or red/pink eye. It also tells you when you should become concerned and when it is best to seek advice from a health professional.

## Useful facts

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation or infection of the transparent membrane (conjunctiva) that lines your eyelid and covers the white part of your eyeball.

When small blood vessels in the conjunctiva become inflamed, they are more visible and this causes the whites of your eyes to appear reddish or pink. At the same time, your eye produces more tears and mucus. When this leaks out it is known as a discharge; it can be yellow and stick to lashes.

Conjunctivitis is generally caused by:

- a bacterial or viral infection (known as infective conjunctivitis),
- an allergic reaction such as hay fever (known as allergic conjunctivitis),
- a reaction to a chemical such as chlorine or shampoo or an eyelash (known as irritant conjunctivitis) or,
- a blocked or partially blocked tear duct. This particularly affects babies.

Though conjunctivitis can be irritating, it rarely affects your vision. It can be contagious, so it is important to know how to stop it from spreading (see "What can I do to get myself better – now and in the future?").

Where the conjunctivitis is caused by infection it can be contagious for up to 14 days from the start of symptoms, but, providing you do not feel unwell there is no need to stay away from work or school.

## What can I expect to happen?

Conjunctivitis can affect one eye but often affects both.

### Symptoms include:

- Redness
- Itchiness
- Wateriness
- Pus that can stick to the lashes and is contagious
- A burning sensation
- A gritty feeling

Conjunctivitis symptoms usually lasts 7 – 10 days and should completely clear up within 2 weeks.

Infective conjunctivitis can be contagious for up to 14 days from the start of symptoms.

## What can I do to get myself better - now and in the future?

There are things you can do to help ease your symptoms and stop the spread of conjunctivitis:

### Do:

- Wash your hands with soap regularly, especially after touching your eyes.
- Regularly clean any sticky discharge or secretions from your eyelids with cotton wool soaked in boiled and cooled water. (Use one piece for each eye to avoid cross infection).
- Place cool compresses (such as a flannel soaked in cold water) on the affected eye(s) to ease symptoms.
- Speak to a member of the pharmacy team about symptoms of conjunctivitis. They can give you advice and suggest eyedrops or antihistamines to help relieve symptoms.
- Use eye drops, gel or ointment from your pharmacy to lubricate and sooth the eye(s). Use pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen to reduce discomfort.
- For allergy related conjunctivitis try to determine the cause and, where possible, minimise or avoid future contact.
- Always store eye drops as directed on the package (not always in the fridge) and discard as instructed – usually 28 days after opening - by returning to a pharmacist for safe disposal.

*Continued on next page...*

## (continued) What can I do to get myself better – now and in the future?

### Do not:

- rub your eyes.
- share towels, pillows or utensils (keep a separate towel, face cloth and soap for yourself.)
- allow anyone else to use any ointment or drops you are using.
- wear a contact lens in the affected eye(s) until all symptoms and signs of infection have gone and any treatment has been completed for 24 hours.

**Unless the conjunctivitis is caused by a bacterial infection, antibiotic eye drops will not help and should not be used; for advice speak to a member of your community pharmacy team.**

If you get conjunctivitis repeatedly, you may be able to avoid future episodes by cleaning your eyes regularly with cooled boiled water.

If you need treatment for a child under 2 years, check with your local pharmacy, as you may need to see your GP for a prescription.

## When to seek medical help

- If your baby has conjunctivitis and is less than 28 days old, make an urgent appointment with your surgery or contact NHS 111 in England & Wales, the Phone First Service in Northern Ireland or NHS24 in Scotland.
- If you wear contact lenses and have conjunctivitis symptoms and spots on your eyelids, you might be allergic to the lenses, but infections can be serious, so do not wear them, and contact your optician or optometrist immediately for advice.
- If your symptoms have not cleared up after 2 weeks, get advice from your surgery.

Some symptoms could suggest a more serious eye problem. If you are not sure or if you have any of the following symptoms, ring NHS111 in England and Wales, the Phone First service in Northern Ireland or NHS24 in Scotland. They will tell you what to do and can arrange a call from a health care professional if you need one:

- Pain in your eyes
- Sensitivity to light
- Changes in your vision, like wavy lines, flashing or very blurred vision
- Very red eyes (1 eye or both eyes)
- Spots or blisters on your eyelids

## Where can I find out more?

Further information about conjunctivitis is available from:

- <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/eyes/conjunctivitis>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/conjunctivitis/>
- <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/conditions/conjunctivitis>
- <https://111.wales.nhs.uk/Conjunctivitis/>
- Moorfields Eye Hospital Conjunctivitis advice: <https://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/condition/conjunctivitis>

## Coronavirus

It is still important to be mindful about coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, which are the same for adults and children and can include: a high temperature, a new and continuous cough, a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste, feeling tired, shortness of breath, headache, sore throat, diarrhoea, feeling sick or being sick, aching muscles, a blocked or runny nose. These are similar to symptoms of illness such as colds and flu.

You should consult the advice specific to your area in the UK.

*If you are in a high risk group, it is important that you read the appropriate sections and make contact with the recommended agencies if you have symptoms or queries.*

For advice on what to do if you have symptoms, testing and vaccination information, please visit:

- NHS England: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- Northern Ireland NIDirect: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>
- NHS Inform for Scotland: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>
- NHS Wales 111: <https://111.wales>.

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