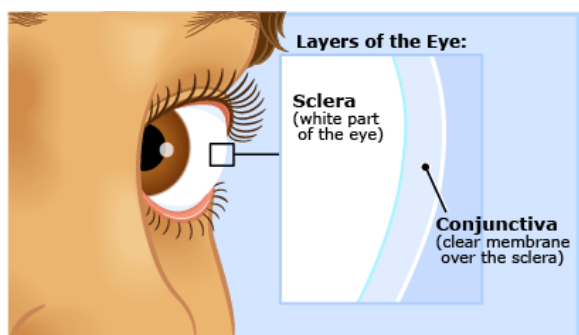


Pinkeye (Conjunctivitis)

What Is Conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is the most common eye problem kids can have. It can cause redness; itching; inflammation or swelling; and a clear or white, yellow, or greenish gooey liquid to collect in the eyes.



It's called pinkeye because the white part of the eye and inside the eyelids become red or pink when you have it. Pinkeye may start in one eye, but many people get conjunctivitis in both eyes at the same time. Conjunctivitis usually doesn't hurt, but itching can be annoying. Sometimes it feels like you have an eyelash or a speck of sand in your eye and can't get it out.

Adults, especially parents and teachers who spend a lot of time with kids, can get conjunctivitis too. Conjunctivitis lasts a short time, usually about a week or less, and then goes away by itself or after treatment.

How Do I Get Conjunctivitis?

Kids get conjunctivitis for different reasons. Most kids get it from **bacteria** or viruses. This is called **infectious** conjunctivitis. Bacteria live on your skin or in your nose or mouth all the time and you never know it. Most don't ever bother you, but certain kinds of bacteria can cause infections like conjunctivitis.

Sometimes kids get ear infections when they have conjunctivitis because the same bacteria can cause both problems.

Viruses, like the kind that can give you a cold, can cause conjunctivitis, too. Conjunctivitis is easy to catch just through touching. You can get conjunctivitis by touching the hand of an infected friend who has touched his or her eyes. If you then touch your eyes, the infection can be spread to you. Washing your hands often with warm, soapy water is the best way to avoid being infected with conjunctivitis.

Kids also get conjunctivitis because of allergies or because they get something irritating in their eyes, but these kinds of conjunctivitis are not contagious.

What Should I Do if I Think I Have It?

If your eyes are itchy, red, or more crusty than usual in the morning, you should tell a parent. Don't wait, because conjunctivitis spreads easily. Your mom or dad probably will call the doctor for an appointment.

What Will the Doctor Do?

No one knows exactly how many kids get conjunctivitis each year but your doctor treats many who have it and can spot it pretty quickly. The doctor also will ask you if your eyes have been red and itchy lately or if you have noticed any goopy stuff in your eyes. It's important to tell the doctor if you know anyone, like a brother or a friend, who has red and itchy eyes too.

Your doctor will know if you have conjunctivitis by looking carefully at your eyes to see if they are red and if any liquid is coming from them. The doctor will want to know that you can see OK and that nothing has gotten into your eye. Finally, your doctor may examine your ears to see if you have an ear infection caused by the same bacteria that can cause conjunctivitis.

If you have conjunctivitis caused by bacteria, the doctor will probably prescribe antibiotic eye drops or ointment for you. Your mom or dad can help you put the medication in your eyes a couple of times a day for about a week. It's important to use whatever the doctor prescribes so the infection doesn't come back. Unfortunately, these drops won't work if a virus is causing your conjunctivitis. If allergies are causing your itchy, red eyes, the doctor may prescribe special eye drops to help with these allergy symptoms.

If your eyes are bothering you, try using a cool or warm washcloth on your eyes. Sometimes, your mom or dad can make you feel better by gently cleaning your eyes with warm water and cotton balls to remove the gooey liquid or crusty stuff. They should be very careful to wash their hands and throw out the cotton balls they use. Washcloths and towels used to clean or dry your eyes should go right into the laundry so no one else gets infected.

Most schools in the United States require a note from a doctor for a kid with pinkeye to return to school. Kids can usually return to school after their first 24 hours of antibiotic eye drops.

Though it might be tough, try not to touch your eyes and remember to wash your hands often. These two things will help keep pinkeye from spreading to your friends and family members. They will appreciate it!

Reviewed by: Yamini Durani, MD

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Notes from the Nurse: _____