

What is pink eye?

- Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the thin, clear membrane (conjunctiva) that covers the eye.

What causes pink eye?

- Pink eye can be caused by bacteria, viruses, allergies, chemicals (such as smoke), irritants (such as dust), and other germs.
- Newborns can get pink eye from medication put in the eye after birth to prevent infection. They can also get it from germs in the birth canal during delivery.

Who can get pink eye?

- Pink eye caused by bacteria is often found in pre-school children.
- Pink eye caused by a virus is often found in school-age children.
- Children with ear infections may also have pink eye.

What are the symptoms of pink eye?

- The usual sign of pink eye is redness around the white of the eye.
- Infection may begin in one eye but will probably spread to the other.
- The eyes may be teary.
- The eyes may have discharge in them. The discharge may be watery or thick with mucus and pus. If discharge is crusty, it may look like your child has "sleep" in the corners of the eye.
- The discharge can cause the eyelids to stick together.
- Tears and discharge may cause some blurred vision.
- Your child may complain that it feels like something is in his eye.
- His eyes may itch or burn.

Is pink eye contagious?

- Yes. Pink eye is contagious.
- Pink eye is spread by direct contact with infected persons or items.
- Pink eye can be spread through coughing and sneezing.

How is pink eye treated?

Pink eye is usually treated with antibiotic drops or ointment. Do not use leftover eye medication from past infections before asking your doctor. If your child fights the eye drops and ointment, talk to your doctor about giving antibiotics by mouth.

- First, wipe the eyes off with a tissue or cotton ball dipped in warm water. Clean off the mucus and pus.
- Warn older children that the medicine could burn for a few seconds. Ask them to look up while you put in the medication.
- Give the medicine your doctor tells you to use. Ask if both eyes need treatment.
- Generally, medicine should be given 3-4 times a day for about 5-7 days.

Drops

- Gently pull the lower lid down. Put one drop in the pouch of the lower eye. Do not touch the dropper to the eye.
- It may be easier to put eye drops in while the child lies down on his back. With his eyes closed, place one drop in the corner of each eye. Pull the lids apart or tell your child to blink. The drops will run into the eyes.

Ointment

- Gently pull the lower lid down. Put a line of ointment in the pink part of the lower lid, like making a line of glue. Do not touch the tube to the eye.
- It may be easier to put ointment on while the child is lying down.

How long does pink eye last?

- How long pink eye lasts can depend on what kind of infection it is.
- Viral infections usually last 8 to 10 days.
- Bacterial infections can be treated with antibiotics. The antibiotics cure most cases in 3 to 5 days.
- Your child can play while he is infected. Avoid swimming until the eyes are healed.
- Children with a bacterial infection can return to school or daycare after 1 full day of treatment or after drainage from the eye has stopped. Children with a viral infection may need to stay home longer. Ask the doctor.

How can pink eye be prevented?

- Wash your hands often to prevent the spread of infection, especially after contact with the infected person.
- Tell older children not to rub or touch their eyes. Keeping younger children's hands from their eyes will be harder.
- The infected child should wash his hands often, especially after touching his eyes or using a tissue. Throw the tissue away at once.
- The infected child should not share towels, washcloths, and pillows. Wash or change his towels and pillowcases each day until the eyes have healed.

When should I call the doctor?

- Call the doctor at once if the eyelid and area around the eye is swollen, red, or tender.
- Call the doctor at once if your child has constant blurred vision or double vision.
- Call the doctor at once if your child has severe eye pain or if his eyes are very sensitive to light.
- Call the doctor if your child has a fever over 102 degrees F (or 39 degrees C).
- Call the doctor if your child has small blisters close to the eye or cloudy tissue over the eye.
- Call the doctor if symptoms aren't better after 2 days of treatment. When left untreated, call if symptoms aren't better after 7 days.
- Call the doctor if your child has an earache. Call the doctor if your infant pulls at his ears, is cranky, or cannot sleep.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about your child's illness.

Quick Answers

- Pink eye is an inflammation of the thin, clear membrane that covers the eye.
- Pink eye is caused by bacteria, viruses, allergies, chemicals, irritants, and other germs.
- Pink eye is most often found in school-age children.
- Pink eye causes redness around the white of the eye. The eyes may be watery or have discharge in them.
- Pink eye is spread by direct contact with infected persons or items.
- Pink eye is usually treated with antibiotic drops or ointment.
- Viral infections usually last 8-10 days and bacterial infections usually last 3-5 days with treatment.
- Wash your hands often to prevent the spread of infection and avoid sharing items with the infected person.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about your child's illness.

References

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