Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)

Pink Eye is the inflammation of the thin layer of tissue that lines the eye and the inside of the eyelid.

When conjunctivitis is caused by a viral or bacterial infection, it can be both uncomfortable and very contagious. Thankfully, conjunctivitis is usually self-limited and rarely results in serious complications. Self-limited infections can be treated without seeing a medical provider.

Symptoms
(May last 7-10 days but often resolves within 5 days)

- Redness
- Discharge
- Itching / burning
- Gritty feeling / feeling that something is in your eye
- Swollen eyelids

Self-care measures
- Use cold compresses.
- Use artificial tears or saline drops (e.g., CMC/Glycerin drops or Refresh Plus®).
- If you use contact lenses, stop until you no longer have symptoms.
- Do not use eye makeup.

NOTE: Throw away worn contacts and any eye makeup used while having symptoms.

Limit spread to others
You may be contagious for 7-14 days. This should not prevent you from attending classes or other events, but you should follow these precautions:

- Avoid touching your eyes.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
- Do not share towels.
• Avoid intimate contact with others.
• If you work in a health care setting, a child care setting, or handle food, you should not work until there is no discharge from the eye.

When to seek care from a medical provider
• You have a known injury to the eye.
• If you have moderate / severe pain to one or both eyes.
• If you have any loss of vision (not just blurry).
• For symptoms lasting more than 7-10 days.

To make an appointment at Cornell Health, call 607-255-5155 during business hours, or go to myCornellHealth (from health.cornell.edu) and find a time that works for you.

Other resources
• US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): cdc.gov/conjunctivitis/about/causes.html

Sometimes the only symptom of conjunctivitis is a pink eye.

Other times—especially with bacterial conjunctivitis—there can be some goopy discharge.

Note: sometimes pink eye is caused by exposure to allergens (pollen, smoke, etc.) These forms of pink eye are not contagious.