Self-Care Guide

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.

(over)
• 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.