

## What is Conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis, commonly known as pink eye, is an infection of the conjunctiva (the outer-most layer of the eye that covers the sclera). The three most common types of conjunctivitis are: viral, allergic, and bacterial. Each requires different treatments. With the exception of the allergic type, conjunctivitis is typically contagious.

The viral type is often associated with an upper respiratory tract infection, cold, or sore throat. The allergic type occurs more frequently among those with systemic allergies. When related to allergies, the symptoms are often seasonal. Allergic conjunctivitis may also be caused by intolerance to substances such as cosmetics, perfume, or drugs. Bacterial conjunctivitis is often caused by bacteria such as staphylococcus and streptococcus.

Conjunctivitis is diagnosed during a routine eye exam using a slit lamp microscope. In advanced cases, cultures can be taken to determine the type of bacteria causing the infection.

## Signs and Symptoms of Viral Conjunctivitis

- Watery discharge
- Irritation
- Red eye
- Infection usually begins with one eye, but may spread easily to the fellow eye
- Upper respiratory or systemic viral symptoms

## Signs and Symptoms of Allergic Conjunctivitis:

- Usually affects both eyes
- Itching
- Tearing
- Swollen eyelids

## Signs and Symptoms of Bacterial Conjunctivitis

- Mucus discharge that may cause the lids to stick together, especially after sleeping
- Redness
- Tearing
- Irritation and/or a gritty feeling
- Usually affects only one eye, but may spread easily to the fellow eye

## Treatment options

Conjunctivitis requires medical attention. The appropriate treatment depends on the cause of the problem. To avoid spreading infection, take these simple steps:

- Disinfect surfaces such as doorknobs and counters.
- Avoid swimming
- Avoid touching the face
- Wash hands frequently
- Don't share items such as, towels or washcloths
- Do not reuse handkerchiefs (using a tissue is best)
- Avoid shaking hands -be considerate of others
- Frequently wash pillow cases

## Treatment Options for Viral Conjunctivitis

Like the common cold, there is no cure for viral conjunctivitis; however, the symptoms can be relieved with cool compresses and artificial tears (found in most pharmacies). Viral conjunctivitis usually resolves within 1-3 weeks.

## Treatment Options for Allergic Conjunctivitis:

For the allergic type, cool compresses and artificial tears sometimes relieve discomfort in mild cases. In more severe cases, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications and antihistamines may be prescribed. Some patients with persistent allergic conjunctivitis may also require topical steroid drops.

## Treatment Options for Bacterial Conjunctivitis

Bacterial conjunctivitis is usually treated with antibiotic eye drops or ointments that cover a broad range of bacteria. Recovery usually takes 1-2 weeks.