



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)

What is pink eye?

Pink eye, or conjunctivitis, is a reddening or infection of the eye that has many different causes including viruses, bacteria, allergies, or objects in the eye. The most common causes of pink eye are viral and bacterial infections. Pink eye is an irritating and fairly common condition, but rarely causes long term eye or vision damage.

How is pink eye spread?

Pink eye is spread by:

- Direct contact with the infected person's eye drainage or drainage from the person's cough, sneeze, or runny nose
- Indirect contact with objects that may have the infected person's drainage on them (i.e. eye makeup, shared eye medications, eye contact solution, towels, pillow cases, blankets)
- Contact with the infected person's fingers or hands which may contain the virus or bacteria

Who is at risk for pink eye?

People who are exposed to someone infected with the viral or bacterial form of conjunctivitis are at risk for developing pink eye. Children and adults can develop both bacterial and viral pink eye; however bacterial pink eye is more common in young children.

How do I know if I have pink eye?

Pink eye may create the feeling of having a foreign object in the eye that can't be removed. There may be a drainage coming from the eyes, and the eyes may feel crusted over or stuck shut upon awakening in the morning. If the drainage has a

yellow-greenish color, the cause of infection is more likely to be bacterial. The whites of the eyes usually have a pink or reddish cast to them. Other symptoms include:

- Eye pain
- Increased tearing
- Itching of the eye
- Sensitivity to light

How is pink eye treated?

If a person shows symptoms of pink eye, it is important to see your healthcare provider. Bacterial pink eye is treated with antibiotic ointment or eye drops. If the cause is bacterial you should notice improvement within 1-2 days after starting treatment. There is no treatment for viral pink eye, unless very severe.

How is pink eye prevented?

Pink eye can be prevented by:

- Always washing hands with soap and water or an alcohol based hand sanitizer prior to and following contact with a person who has pink eye
- Avoiding touching or rubbing your eyes
- Not sharing personal articles that come in contact with the eyes (such as eye make-up, towels, wash cloths, eye droppers, eye glasses)
- Do not use same eye dropper for non infected eye and infected eye
- Changing towels and wash cloths daily
- Changing pillow cases often

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

CDC website

<http://www.cdc.gov/conjunctivitis/index.html>

NIH website

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001010.htm>

This page was last reviewed June 13, 2014.