

## HEALTH ISSUES

# Pinkeye (Conjunctivitis)



Pinkeye (*Conjunctivitis*) is the inflammation (ie, redness, swelling) of the thin tissue covering the white part of the **eye** and the inside of the eyelids.

## What are the signs or symptoms?

There are several kinds of pinkeye, including:

- Bacterial
  - Red or pink, itchy, painful eye(s).
  - More than a tiny amount of green or yellow discharge.
  - Infected eyes may be crusted shut in the morning.
  - May affect one or both eyes.
- Viral
  - Pink, swollen, watering eye(s) sensitive to light.
  - May affect only one eye.
- Allergic
  - Itching, redness, and excessive tearing, usually of both eyes.
- Chemical
  - Red, watery eyes, especially after **swimming** in chlorinated water.
- Immune mediated, such as that related to a systemic disease like **Kawasaki disease**.

## What are the incubation and contagious periods?

Depending on the type of pinkeye, the incubation period (*the time between being exposed to the disease and when the symptoms start*) varies:

- Bacterial
  - The incubation period is unknown because the bacteria that cause it are commonly present in most people and do not usually cause infection.

- The contagious period ends when the course of medication is started or when the symptoms are no longer present.
- Viral
  - Sometimes occurs early in the course of a viral respiratory tract disease that has other signs or symptoms.
  - One type of viral conjunctivitis, adenovirus, may be contagious for weeks after the appearance of signs or symptoms. Children with adenovirus infection are often ill with fever, sore throat, and other respiratory tract symptoms. This virus may uncommonly cause **outbreaks in child care and school settings**. **Antibiotics** for this condition do not help the patient or reduce spread.
  - The contagious period continues while the signs or symptoms are present.
- Allergic
  - Occurs in response to contact with the agent that causes the allergic reaction. The reaction may be immediate or delayed for many hours or days after the contact.
  - No contagious period.
- Chemical
  - Usually appears shortly after contact with the irritating substance.
  - No contagious period.

## How is it spread?

Hands become contaminated by direct contact with discharge from an infected eye, or by touching other surfaces that have been contaminated by respiratory tract secretions, and gets into the child's eyes.

## How do you control it?

- Consult a health professional for diagnosis and possible treatment. The role of antibiotics in preventing spread is unclear. Antibiotics shorten the course of illness a very small amount. Most children with pinkeye get better after 5 or 6 days without antibiotics.
- Careful **hand hygiene** before and after touching the eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Careful **sanitation** of objects that are commonly touched by hands or faces, such as tables, doorknobs, telephones, cots, cuddle blankets, and toys.

It is helpful to think of pinkeye like the **common cold**. Both conditions may be passed on to other children but resolve without treatment. Pinkeye generally results in less symptoms of illness than the common cold. The best method for preventing spread is good hand hygiene.

## Additional Resources:

- [Hand Washing: A Powerful Antidote to Illness](#)
- [Eye Infections](#)
- [Specific Eye Problems](#)
- [Preventing the Spread of Illness in Child Care and School](#)

### **Last Updated**

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### **Source**

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