

PINK EYE: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Conjunctivitis, often called “pink eye”, is one of the most common and treatable eye conditions in children and adults.

Conjunctivitis simply means irritation / swelling of eye tissues which causes inflammation of the conjunctiva: the tissue that lines the inside of the eyelid and the white of the eyeball and helps keep the eyelid and eyeball moist.

There are actually **4 types** of pinkeye, and **only 2 types are contagious**:

1. **Allergic conjunctivitis:** caused by allergens cause the eyes to be red and watery is not contagious
2. **Contact conjunctivitis: exposures to chemicals/ irritating substances** (strong orders/fumes / pool chlorine/ shampoo, dust, dirt, smoke,) can also cause a non-contagious conjunctivitis.
3. **Viral conjunctivitis** caused by a virus (usually the common cold (adenovirus) is contagious. The only treatment is time! And yes, your child is VERY contagious until it clears up. There are no medications available to treat or cure viral conjunctivitis.
4. **Bacterial conjunctivitis** is contagious, due to bacteria that cause infections that require treatment with either antibiotic eye drops or oral antibiotics (if there is a sinus infection and/or ear infection accompanying the pinkeye).

It is important to find out whether your child’s pink eye is caused by allergies or infection (viral or bacterial) because each condition has different treatments and risks. **As a result, school policy requires children with symptoms consistent with contagious “pink eye” to have a medical evaluation and provide written clearance for returning to school. Your child is contagious and must remain home until she/he has completed a minimum of a full 24 hours of doses of antibiotic medications.

Sometimes it is difficult to sort out the non-contagious from the contagious. Spring brings more allergic cases of pink eye. If your child is known to have spring allergies you should have already started their seasonal medications BEFORE the season begins. These medications must be taken daily, not occasionally.

ALLERGIC pink eye:

- Redness in the white of the eye or inner eyelid
- Increased amount of tears
- Itchy eyes
- Blurred vision
- Swelling of the eyelid
- Usually in both eyes (can be in only one—especially when associated with contact with allergen trigger to only one eye)

The best defense against allergic pink eye is a good offense:

- Have your child wear a base ball cap to and from school and when outside. This catches the pollens and keeps it away from eyes and face
- When they arrive inside from outside, wash hands and face, paying attention to splashing water in/on eyes and eye lashes to remove pollen.

- When arriving home, change clothes making sure not to shake the pollen off and into your home.
- Long hair should be worn pulled back away from the face so any trapped pollen stays put.
- Bangs should be kept trimmed above eyes and hair kept from falling into eyes.

VIRAL pink eye:

- Watery eye discharge
- Sensation that there is something gritty in the eye.
- It can also be associated with a sore throat (caused by the same virus – which means, no antibiotics can treat it).
- In one eye (can be transferred to other eye after time)
- Child should use separate towel and pillow
- **GOOD HAND WASHING**
- Keep hands/fingers away from face, mouth, eyes

BATERIAL pink eye :

- “Goopier” eye discharge that *recollects* after you wipe it away.
- Usually thick and yellow/green
- Crusty or stuck together eye lashes (especially upon waking)
- Can be associated with a sinus or ear infection.
- In one eye (can be transferred to other eye)
- **Wash your hands** before / after applying the eye drops or ointment the eye.
- Don't let dropper touch any part of the eye.
- Do not use eye drops in a non-infected eye that were used in an infected eye
- Separate towel and pillow
- **GOOD HAND WASHING**
- Keep hands/fingers away from face, mouth, eyes
- Contact wearers are at higher risk for eye infections and should follow sanitary procedures for handling and wearing contact lens. Never share contacts.

Contagious pink eye is spread by cough and nose droplets, direct contact with the eye discharge, and touching surfaces where someone has left those germs and then touching the same place (like a hand towel, doorknob, cell phone, game controller or keyboard) and touching eyes/nose/mouth. The incubation period is about 2-14 days before the next person comes down with it. I am available to answer questions, including demonstrating how to best instill eye drops in your child's eyes.

