



"Pink eye" — It's a term that may sound scary, but this common eye problem typically is easily treated and, with a few simple precautions, can often be avoided. **Anyone** can get pink eye, but preschoolers, schoolchildren, college students, teachers and daycare workers are particularly at risk for the contagious types of pink eye due to their close proximity with others in the classroom. Here are the essentials about pink eye (conjunctivitis) that you should know:

Pink Eye (aka Conjunctivitis) is a common eye condition worldwide. It causes inflammation (swelling) of the conjunctiva—the thin layer that lines the inside of the eyelid and covers the white part of the eye. Conjunctivitis is often called "pink eye" or "red eye" because it can cause the white of the eye to take on a pink or red color. The most common causes of conjunctivitis are viruses, bacteria and allergens. But there are other causes, including chemicals, fungi, certain diseases and contact lens wear. The conjunctiva can also become irritated by foreign bodies in the eye and by indoor and outdoor air pollution caused, for example, by chemical vapors, fumes, smoke, or dust.

- **Viral conjunctivitis.** Caused by a virus, like the common cold. This type of pink eye is very contagious, but usually will clear up on its own within several days without medical treatment;
- **Bacterial conjunctivitis.** Caused by bacteria, this type of conjunctivitis can cause serious damage to the eye if left untreated;
- **Allergic conjunctivitis.** Caused by eye irritants such as pollen, dust and animal dander among susceptible individuals. Allergic conjunctivitis may be seasonal (pollen) or flare up year-round (dust; pet dander).

No surprise: the **PRIMARY SYMPTOM** of pink eye is an eye that has a pink appearance. Other symptoms of pink eye depend on the type of conjunctivitis you have:

- **Viral conjunctivitis.** Watery, itchy eyes; sensitivity to light. One or both eyes can be affected. Highly contagious; can be spread by coughing and sneezing
- **Bacterial conjunctivitis.** A sticky, yellow or greenish-yellow eye discharge in the corner of the eye. In some cases, this discharge can be severe enough to cause the eyelids to be stuck together when you wake up. One or both eyes can be affected. Contagious (usually by direct contact with infected hands or items that have touched the eye).
- **Allergic conjunctivitis.** Watery, burning, itchy eyes; often accompanied by stuffiness and a runny nose, and light sensitivity. Both eyes are affected. Not contagious

Pink-Eye Treatment

As you would expect, the treatment of pink eye depends on the type of conjunctivitis you have:

Viral conjunctivitis. In most cases, viral conjunctivitis will run its course over a period of several days and no medical treatment is required or indicated. A home remedy of applying a cold, wet washcloth to the eyes several times a day can relieve symptoms. (Due to the highly contagious nature of this type of pink eye, be sure not to share this washcloth with others!)

Bacterial conjunctivitis. Your eye doctor typically will prescribe antibiotic eye drops or ointments for the treatment of bacterial conjunctivitis.

Allergic conjunctivitis. Allergy medications often can help prevent or shorten bouts of allergic conjunctivitis. Sometimes these medications must be started before allergy season or allergy flare-ups begin. Ask your doctor for details.

Pink-Eye Prevention

- Never share personal items such as washcloths, hand towels or tissue;
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, and avoid rubbing or touching your eyes;
- Never (EVER) share contact lens;
- Wash your hands frequently, especially when spending time at school or in other public places;
- If you know you suffer from seasonal allergies, ask your doctor what can be done to minimize your symptoms before they begin.