

## CONJUNCTIVITIS (PINKEYE)

Conjunctivitis is redness and inflammation of the membrane (conjunctiva) that covers the eye and lines the inner surface of the eyelid. Pinkeye is a common infection in young children.

- CAUSE** Viruses, bacteria, allergies, eye injuries, or chemicals.
- SYMPTOMS** Includes redness, itching, pain and discharge, depending on the cause. Bacterial conjunctivitis can sometimes be distinguished from other forms of conjunctivitis by a more purulent (pus) discharge.
- SPREAD** Touching the secretions from the eyes, nose, or mouth of infected persons.
- INCUBATION** It takes about 1 to 12 days after exposure for symptoms to begin, usually 1 to 3 days.
- CONTAGIOUS PERIOD** While symptoms are present.
- EXCLUSION** Childcare and School:  
**Purulent conjunctivitis** (redness of eyes and/or eyelids with thick white or yellow eye discharge and eye pain): Until examined by a health care provider and approved for readmission.  
**Nonpurulent conjunctivitis** (redness of eyes with a clear, watery eye discharge but without fever, eye pain, or eyelid redness): None, may be considered if child is unable to keep hands away from eyes.
- DIAGNOSIS** Recommend parents/guardians call their health care provider if their child has redness of eyes and/or eyelids with pus and/or fever or eye pain.
- TREATMENT** If a bacterial infection is diagnosed, antibiotic treatment is available. If the infection appears to be viral, no specific antiviral treatment is usually needed.

### PREVENTION/CONTROL

- Cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing. Use a tissue or your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues in the trash.
- Encourage children not to rub eyes. Keep child's eyes wiped free of discharge. Avoid contact with eye drainage. Wear gloves when administering eye drops/medications or use a cotton-tipped swab to apply medication to the eyes.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after contact with eye drainage. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.**
- Do not share any articles that come in contact with the eyes, such as towels, washcloths, eye makeup, contact lens solution, or eye drops.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

Prepared by Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department (HSPHD)

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