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: No exclusion, unless the child has a fever or is not healthy enough to participate in routine activities. Antibiotics or a note from a health care provider are not required. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends considering conjunctivitis like the common cold – both diseases are easily spread among children and both resolve without treatment.

**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. Antibiotics may shorten the duration of illness minimally – most children with conjunctivitis recover after 5 or 6 days without antibiotics. The role of antibiotics in preventing spread of conjunctivitis is unclear. 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)

March 2019