

Conjunctivitis

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"Pink Eye" or Conjunctivitis, is a common problem in school aged children. this brief note should clear up some common misconceptions about "pink eye" and outline a reasonable policy for children in school with this problem.

The most common type of conjunctivitis is caused by a viral infection with one of the common cold viruses. This is the only type that is highly contagious. It is not dangerous and gradually clears on its own over several days. Since it is caused by a virus, it is **NOT** eliminated and it is **NOT MADE LESS CONTAGIOUS** by the use of antibiotic drops (even though it has been common practice to use them). In fact, these drops may actually help spread the virus. Frequent hand-washing and avoiding touching others, especially if there is a lot of drainage, is the best way to reduce the spread of this.

Other types of conjunctivitis exist (for example, allergic and bacterial), which may require different treatment, but these are not significantly contagious. Only a discussion with your child's physician can determine what treatment might be appropriate.

If your child has "pink eye":

1. Talk with him/her about the importance of not touching the eyes or other people until after the infection has cleared.
2. Hands should be washed mid-morning, before lunch and mid-afternoon.

If your child cannot cooperate with these measures or if there is a large amount of drainage, you should keep him/her home. Since conjunctivitis is not a dangerous condition, it is not necessary to keep all children with "pink eye: out of school. This approach should actually reduce the transmission of the virus in school, compared with the tendency to assume that a child on eye drops was "not contagious."

If there are any questions or concerns, feel free to discuss them with the school nurse, or leave a message at my office (554-3119), and I will try to address them.