

Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)

Conjunctivitis is a common infection affecting one or both eyes that causes the white of the eye to appear pink or red. Vision is usually normal; however, the eye may water profusely and feel irritated. Eyelids may be swollen. A discharge of liquid or mucus from the infected eye may occur. Eyelids and lashes may become crusted and stick together as the mucus hardens, particularly while sleeping. The student may complain of itching, pain, or sensitivity to light.

Conjunctivitis is commonly caused by viruses or bacteria that may first manifest in one eye and then spread to the other eye within days. Viral conjunctivitis usually produces a clear, watery discharge. Bacterial conjunctivitis usually produces a thicker, yellow-green discharge. Eyelids stuck together after sleeping are most common with bacterial conjunctivitis.

Conjunctivitis may also be caused from allergens, such as cosmetics or pollen; reaction to air pollutants, such as dust or smoke; and foreign bodies in the eye, such as contact lenses. Certain chronic illnesses may also cause conjunctivitis.

Bacterial and viral conjunctivitis are easily spread through contact with discharge from the eye or respiratory passages, or from touching or sharing contaminated items of the infected person, such as eye cosmetics, contact lenses, pillows, towels, and microscope eyepieces.

Bacterial conjunctivitis generally lasts fewer than 5 days, but may persist up to 2–3 weeks. It is contagious while symptoms are present, or until a course of treatment (such as an antibiotic) is started.

Students will be sent home from school and parents are advised to refer to licensed health care provider if there is white or yellow drainage from the eye, altered vision, and/or redness of the eyelid or skin surrounding the eye. Minimal redness to the white of the eye with no other symptoms is not grounds for exclusion.