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Pinkeye (Conjunctivitis)

What is pinkeye?

Often referred to as pinkeye, conjunctivitis is inflammation (i.e., redness, swelling) of the thin tissue covering the white part of the eye and the inside of the eyelids. There are several different kinds of pinkeye, including bacterial, viral, allergic and chemical.

Who is at risk for pinkeye?

Everyone is at risk for conjunctivitis.

What are the symptoms of pinkeye?

Bacterial
- Pink or red, painful, itchy
- More than a tiny amount of yellow or green discharge
- Infected eyes may be crusted shut in the morning
- May affect one or both eyes

Viral
- Swollen, pink watering eye(s) sensitive to light
- May affect only one eye

Allergic
- Redness, itching, and excessive tearing, usually of both eyes

Chemical
- Watery, red eyes, especially after swimming in chlorinated water.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Bacterial: How long it takes for symptoms to appear is unknown because the bacteria that cause pinkeye are commonly present in most individuals and do not usually cause infection.
Viral: The symptoms sometimes occur early in the course of a viral respiratory disease that has other signs or symptoms.
Allergic: Symptoms occur in response to contact with the agent that causes the allergic reaction. The reaction may be immediate or delayed for many hours or even days after the contact.

How is pinkeye spread?

Pinkeye is spread by hands contaminated by direct contact with discharge from the infected eye or by touching other surfaces that have been contaminated by secretions from the child's eyes. Pinkeye may also be spread by exposure to droplets from the nose and throat of infected people.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

Bacterial: When the course of medication is started, the contagious period ends.
Viral: While the signs or symptoms remain present, the contagious period continues.
Allergic: This type of pinkeye is not contagious.

How is a person diagnosed?

Consult a health-care professional for a positive diagnosis.

What is the treatment?

It is also necessary to consult a health-care professional for treatment. Bacterial conjunctivitis is the only kind of pinkeye that is treated by antibiotics. Health professionals may vary on whether or not to treat pinkeye with antibiotic drops. The role of antibiotics in treatment and preventing spread of conjunctivitis is unclear. Most children with pinkeye get better after five or six days without antibiotics.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No. You can get pinkeye more than once.

Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have pinkeye?

No exclusion for pinkeye is recommended for child care settings, unless the provider is unable to adequately care for the child.

No exclusion for pinkeye is recommended for school or work settings.

What can be done to prevent the spread of conjunctivitis disease?

Preventing the spread of this disease can be accomplished by appropriate hand washing before and after touching the eyes, mouth and nose. It is also very important to carefully sanitize objects that are commonly touched by faces or hands such as doorknobs, tables, telephones, toys and blankets.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/disease or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics. [Children in Out-Of-Home Child Care] In: Kimberlin DW, Brady MT, Jackson MA, Long SS, eds. *Red Book 2018 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 31st ed. Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2018:[128].

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs*. 4th ed. Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2019: [141].