

# Viral Conjunctivitis

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This material will help you understand viral conjunctivitis and how you can manage it.

## **What is conjunctivitis?**

Conjunctivitis, commonly called pink eye, is inflammation of the conjunctiva. The conjunctiva is the thin layer that covers the white of the eye and the inner surface of the eyelids. It produces mucus to coat and moisten the surface of the eye. There are tiny blood vessels inside of the thin layer. When it becomes irritated, these blood vessels become bigger and more noticeable. This irritation will cause the eye to appear red or pink and angry looking.

## **What causes viral conjunctivitis?**

Viruses, such as the common cold, can cause pink eye. People can get pink eye on their own by getting “a cold” in their eye, or they can catch it from someone else. It is most common to catch it from small children.

Pink eye usually produces a watery discharge that lasts from one to two weeks. One clue that you have pink eye is if you wake up with your eye(s) crusted shut in the morning. Pink eye is REALLY contagious. If you are not very careful, not only will you get pink eye in your other eye, but everyone you live with will get pink eye too. To prevent its spread, you need to be cautious. Wash your hands as often as you can, especially after touching your eyes or your face. Use clean towels daily. Wash everyone in your household’s sheets and towels very often. Wash your pillowcase daily. Consider sleeping apart from everyone else. Also, encourage everyone you live with to wash his/her hands as often as possible until the pink eye clears up.

With viral conjunctivitis (pink eye), you may experience:

- Pink or red eyes
- Puffy eyelids
- Itchy or burning eyes
- Watery discharge from the eyes
- Crusting of eyelashes in the morning
- Tearing

### **What should I do to manage my viral conjunctivitis?**

If your doctor has said you have pink eye, you should:

- Keep your hands away from your eyes
- Wash hands before and after applying eye medications
- Do not share towels, washcloths, cosmetics or eye drops
- Keep children home from school, camp, and swimming pools - anywhere where they will play with others - until their eyes are no longer red or weeping, which can be up to 2 weeks
- If your work involves close contact with other people, you will need to stay home until your eyes are no longer red or weeping

Your body will heal viral conjunctivitis on its own, just as it heals a regular cold. To make your eyes feel better, you can use preservative free artificial tears. These preservative free artificial tears are available over the counter. Select the single use vials so that you can use each of them once and throw them out. If you use a bottle more than once, you run the risk of contaminating a whole bottle of tears and then re-infecting yourself. Since these drops help to soothe the eye and they have no preservatives, you can use them as many times throughout the day as you like. Make sure you wash your hands before and after putting in the eye drops. Throw away each little vial after you use it once. You can also soothe the eyes with a cold washcloth. Take a clean washcloth and

run it under cold water. Use a clean washcloth each time you want to cool your eyes.

**For more information, scan these codes with your smartphone or visit the websites listed.**



<http://www.geteyesmart.org/eyesmart/diseases/pink-eye-conjunctivitis/index.cfm>



<http://www.kellogg.umich.edu/patientcare/conditions/conjunctivitis.html>

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