

Advice about conjunctivitis in your eye

Department of Ophthalmology

Information for Patients

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What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is the inflammation of the thin layer of skin called the 'conjunctiva'. This covers the white of the eye and the inside of the eyelids.

Conjunctivitis is also known as red or pink eye, but other conditions can also cause red eyes.

How is it caused?

Conjunctivitis commonly results from an infection. It may be due to a virus or bacteria. It is often linked with colds, sore throats or viral illnesses.

It can also be caused by an allergy linked with hay fever, happening during spring and summer. Allergies can also be caused by makeup, skin care products, animal hair and plants.

Is it contagious?

It is often difficult to find the source of the original infection, but the condition is contagious and spreads very easily. Infection may start in one of your eyes and can often spread to both. It can also be passed onto others. The advice on page 3 of this leaflet tells you how to stop the spread of bacterial or viral conjunctivitis.

Allergic conjunctivitis is not contagious, so cannot be passed onto someone else.

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What are the signs and symptoms?

- Swollen eyelids.
- Pink or red eyes.
- Sore, gritty and sometimes painful eyes.
- A discharge which is watery (viral conjunctivitis).
- A discharge which is sticky and crusty (bacterial conjunctivitis).
- Itchy and burning (allergic conjunctivitis).

Treatment

Conjunctivitis often does not need treatment as the symptoms usually clear up without treatment.

If treatment is needed, the type of treatment will depend on the cause. To find out the cause of conjunctivitis, a nurse or doctor may need to take a swab from your eyes.

For all types of conjunctivitis, contact lenses must not be worn when using eye drops or ointments.

Below are details of treatment options for the different types of conjunctivitis:

- **Bacterial conjunctivitis:**

This is often treated with eye ointments or drops containing antibiotics applied to the affected eye(s). Eye drops are often advised to be used for 1 to 2 weeks.

- **Viral conjunctivitis:**

There is no treatment for viral conjunctivitis and it is not helped by antibiotics. It will clear up on its own, taking between 3 to 6 weeks to settle.

However, you may be given a prescription for antibiotic drops to stop a secondary infection, along with lubricating eye drops. You may also be advised to use a cold compress to ease the dryness and swelling (inflammation) caused by conjunctivitis.

- **Allergic conjunctivitis:**

Antihistamine medicines or eye drops may be given to help to ease symptoms. You will be told to try to stop contact with the suspected cause of allergy and bathe the eyes in cold water to help relieve symptoms.



How to stop the spread of conjunctivitis

Allergic conjunctivitis is not contagious, so cannot be passed onto someone else.

There are many ways you can prevent the spread of bacterial or viral conjunctivitis. Some examples are listed below:

- Change your pillow case regularly.
- Use clean towels and washcloths. Do not share them with others.
- Wash your hands regularly.
- Try to not touch your eyes with your hands.
- Replace your eye make-up products regularly. Do not share them with others.

Further advice

You will be asked not to wear contact lenses until the infection has gone.

In the case of either bacterial or viral conjunctivitis, if your vision gets worse rather than becoming clearer, please return to Eye Casualty. This is in the Windsor Eye Clinic, Level 1, Windsor Building, Leicester Royal Infirmary.

Opening times: Monday to Friday, 8:30am - 4:30pm

Saturday and Sunday, 8:30am - 12:30pm

If you have any further questions please contact Eye Casualty on **0116 258 6273**.

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