

Fact Sheet: Pinkeye (Conjunctivitis)

What is Pinkeye?

Pinkeye is an inflammation of the white covering of the eye and inner surface of the eyelids. Pinkeye can be caused by an allergic reaction, a viral infection or a bacterial infection.

Allergic

Allergic pinkeye is not contagious. It cannot be spread from person to person, so no exclusion is necessary. This condition is usually seasonal, causes intense itching, watery discharge, minimal redness, if any, and may produce swelling in the eye area.

Viral

Viral pinkeye is more common in older children and adolescents. Hand washing and decreasing hand-to-eye contact are important steps in preventing the spread of viral pinkeye. Other individuals have usually been exposed prior to diagnosis; exclusion from school after diagnosis is not indicated. Often only one eye is affected, the discharge is watery or is clear mucus, and there is significant redness.

Bacterial

Bacterial pinkeye is more common in young children (under 5 years of age), usually involves both eyes, and produces a thick yellow or green discharge and maybe some redness. The child may also have other symptoms, such as thick yellow or green nasal discharge, sinus infection, low-grade fever, cough and earache. Routine hand washing and decreasing hand-to-eye contact are important steps in preventing the spread of bacterial pinkeye.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.

How is it spread? (Viral and Bacterial Only)

Pinkeye is spread through direct contact with the discharge from the infected person's eyes or respiratory tract. You can get pinkeye from someone's fingers or from sharing their eye makeup, clothing, towels and washcloths.

How is it treated?

- If you think you have been infected, see your health care provider for treatment recommendations.
- With bacterial pinkeye, take all medications as prescribed even if you start to feel better.
- If the drainage makes your eyelashes stick together, which usually occurs in the morning, put a warm wet washcloth on your eye to soften the crusts. This may need to be repeated several times. Gently wipe the crusts from your eyelashes.
- Do not scratch or rub your eyes - it will make the infection worse or may spread the infection to the other eye. Use a tissue to gently wipe your eyes and then throw it away in a covered wastebasket.

How is it prevented?

Handwashing and general cleanliness is the best way NOT to get pinkeye. Each person in the home should have his or her own towel and washcloth. Be sure to wash towels and washcloths in hot soapy water. Keep hands away from your eyes. Avoid rubbing and scratching eyes. Wash hands after applying eye drops.

School and Daycare Providers

School personnel are not expected to, nor can they legally diagnose a medical condition: only a licensed physician, nurse practitioner, or physician's assistant may do that under state law. When a school/childcare suspects that a child has "Pinkeye" they should notify the parent and explain that the child's condition needs to be diagnosed and possibly treated by their health care provider. Exclude until eye drainage is clear.