

# Get the Facts on Pinkeye (Conjunctivitis)



**Awareness** CLINICAL SERVICES AND PATIENT CARE PROGRAMS

PINKEYE IS AN INFECTION AND INFLAMMATION of the lining of the eyelid and sclera (the white of the eye). Its primary symptom is bright pink or red eyes, followed by a watery or a thick yellow-green drainage. There are several types of pinkeye: bacterial, viral and allergic.

## **WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?**

Bacterial pinkeye is distinguished by thick, yellowish drainage from the affected eye, which may prevent the eye from opening. Viral pinkeye usually has a watery drainage from the eyes and lymph node swelling in front of the ears. It is often accompanied by a cold.

## **HOW LONG AFTER CONTACT CAN ILLNESS DEVELOP?**

This depends on the cause: bacterial, viral or allergic.

## **HOW IS IT SPREAD?**

Bacterial and viral pinkeye are extremely contagious. Pinkeye is spread through eye-to-hand, hand-to-eye contact. Always have your child wash their hands frequently. Allergies or chemicals (i.e. contact lens solution or cosmetics) cause allergic pinkeye, but the irritation tends to disappear on its own. Allergic pinkeye is not contagious.

## **WHEN IS THE CHILD MOST CONTAGIOUS?**

Depending on the cause, up to two weeks.

## **WHEN CAN THE CHILD RETURN TO SCHOOL?**

Pinkeye with a clear discharge should not prevent a child from attending school. Pinkeye with a white or colored discharge should not prevent a child from attending school once treatment is started. Parents should keep a child home from day care or school 24 to 48 hours as directed by the doctor.

## **WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?**

An actual diagnosis should be made by your child's doctor. Bacterial pinkeye is treated with antibiotic eye drops or ointment. Use drops or ointment only as directed. Never share medicine because infection may spread. Viral pinkeye usually has no treatment and will usually clear up on its own. Ask your child's doctor about treatment for viral pinkeye. Use a warm, wet washcloth to help clear eyes that are sealed closed due to drainage. Warm, moist washcloths may also be used to relieve itching or pain. Use a clean washcloth each time. Use a clean pillowcase every day until pinkeye is gone.

## **HOW CAN WE PREVENT SPREADING INFECTION?**

Do not share an infected child's washcloth, towels or bed linens with others. Good handwashing before and after applying medicine is important.

*This general healthcare information should not be used as a substitute or in place of contacting your child's healthcare provider. If you need further assistance, call 404.250.kids to speak to a pediatric nurse. For more information check out our Web site at [www.choa.org](http://www.choa.org) and click on "medical library," "for professionals" or "for parents."*