Intermountain®
Healthcare

Conjunctivitis (Pinkeye)

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis [kun-jungk-tuh-VAHY-tis] is the medical name for **pinkeye** [PINGK-ahy]. It involves inflammation of the outer layer of the eye — called the **conjunctiva** [kon-jungk-TAHY-vuh] — and the inside of the eyelid.

What causes it?

Conjunctivitis may be caused by:

• Germs (viruses or bacteria)

• Allergies

• Eye drops and contact lens products

• Substances that irritate the eye

What are the symptoms?

Conjunctivitis usually causes these symptoms of the eye:

• Redness

• Burning

• Discharge

• Itching

Conjunctivitis does not usually affect your vision.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider can usually determine the cause of conjunctivitis based on your medical history, symptoms, and an eye exam.

How is it treated?

The treatment for conjunctivitis depends on its cause.

Viral conjunctivitis

Most cases of conjunctivitis caused by a virus are mild. The infection will usually clear up in a week or two without treatment. Your doctor may prescribe antiviral medicine to treat a more serious type of viral conjunctivitis.

Bacterial conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis caused by bacteria is treated with an antibiotic medicine in the form of drops or ointment.

Allergic conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis caused by allergies will usually improve by removing the source of the allergen, such as pet dander or pollen. Your doctor may also prescribe allergy eye drops to help.

When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if you have conjunctivitis along with any of these signs or symptoms:

• Pain or severe redness in the eye(s)

• Blurred vision or sensitivity that doesn't improve when discharge is wiped away

• A weakened immune system caused by cancer treatment, an HIV infection, or other medical conditions or treatments

• Symptoms that don't improve after using antibiotic medicine for 24 hours (if the pinkeye is thought to be caused by bacteria)

Is pinkeye contagious?

Pinkeye may be highly contagious if it is caused by a germ like a virus or certain bacteria. You may be able to prevent the spread of pinkeye by:

• Not touching your eyes with your hands

• Washing your hands often

• Using a clean towel, washcloth, and pillowcase each day

• Not sharing towels, washcloths, or eye-care or eye-cosmetic products

• Throwing away contaminated eye cosmetics

Questions for my doctor

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____