



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Conjunctivitis

(pink eye)

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis or pink eye is an inflammation of the outer lining of the eye. Conjunctivitis is frequently caused by infectious agents, either viruses or bacteria. Conjunctivitis can also be caused by an allergy or by exposure to chemicals that irritate the eye. Anyone can get conjunctivitis, but family members and close friends of someone with infectious conjunctivitis (caused by viruses or bacteria) are at increased risk.

How do you get it?

In infectious conjunctivitis, the fluids from an infected person's eyes are highly contagious. Therefore, it can be passed from person-to-person via contaminated fingers, clothes, towels, and through items such as eye makeup and sunglasses.

What are the symptoms of conjunctivitis?

The symptoms of conjunctivitis may include some or all of the following:

- a scratchy or painful sensation in one or both eyes;
- redness in the whites of the eyes;
- heavy tearing in the eyes; and
- itchy, swollen eyelids.

When do symptoms start?

For bacterial conjunctivitis, the symptoms usually begin 24 to 72 hours after exposure to the infection. For viral conjunctivitis, the onset

of symptoms can range from 12 hours to 12 days after infection. The symptoms can persist for several days, or rarely, for a couple of weeks.

What is the treatment for conjunctivitis?

The treatment varies, depending on the cause of the conjunctivitis. Severe or chronic conjunctivitis should be treated by a doctor.

Should a person with conjunctivitis be excluded from school or work?

Yes. Children with infectious conjunctivitis should be kept out of school to prevent the disease from spreading to other students. It is best to limit contact with infected persons until the symptoms go away. Infected persons can go back to school or work when the itching, pain, and tearing have stopped.

How do you keep from getting it?

- Wash your hands frequently and keep them away from your eyes.
- Use a fresh paper tissue if you must wipe your eyes and discard the tissue immediately after use.
- Do not share your towels, wash cloths, or handkerchiefs with others.
- Do not share sunglasses, eye makeup, eye drops eye medicine, or anything else that touches the eyes.