

Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis is a common infection especially among children under five. Children with conjunctivitis must be kept home from school or day care until the discharge from their eyes has stopped. This will prevent the spread of infection to other children. The incidence of conjunctivitis decreases with age.

Conjunctivitis symptoms

Conjunctivitis leads to:

- Eye irritation and redness
- Excessive tears in the eyes
- A discharge with pus
- Swelling of the eyelids
- Photophobia (you can't tolerate looking into sunlight).

The symptoms usually develop within 24 to 72 hours of becoming infected and last from two days to three weeks.

How you develop conjunctivitis

You could develop conjunctivitis if you come into contact with:

- Discharge from the eyes, nose or throat of an infected person
- Contaminated fingers or objects.

Conjunctivitis can be transmitted from an infected mother to her baby during vaginal delivery.

Confirming that you have conjunctivitis

Your doctor will take a sample of the discharge from your eye. This will be examined under a microscope or grown in a culture to determine if it is conjunctivitis.

Antibiotic eye drops are necessary

If you develop conjunctivitis you will need antibiotic eye drops or ointment to:

- Treat the infection
- Help prevent the spread of conjunctivitis.

You will remain infectious as long as there is a discharge from your eye.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit, Department of Health Victoria Tel. 1300 651 160.
- Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital.

Things to remember

- Conjunctivitis is an infectious eye condition
- Symptoms last from two days to three weeks
- Children with conjunctivitis should be kept home from school
- You will remain infectious as long as you have an eye discharge.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Health - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

This Better Health Channel fact sheet has passed through a rigorous approval process. The information provided was accurate at the time of publication and is not intended to take the place of medical advice. Please seek advice from a qualified health care professional.

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