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Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)

What Is Pink Eye?
Pink eye, or **conjunctivitis**, is swelling or irritation of the conjunctiva — the thin lining that covers the white of the eye and the inside of the eyelids.

What Causes It?
There are several types:

- **Viral**: Typically caused by a common cold virus and occurs with cold symptoms (runny nose, nasal congestion, store throat). Most common cause of pink eye in kids.
- **Bacterial**: Typically spread via contact with someone else who has pink eye. Commonly spread though daycare and school settings.
- **Allergic:** From pollen, pet dander, dust, etc. causing itching, watering, and redness in both eyes. Is not contagious.
- **Irritant/Chemical**: From exposure to chlorine, smoke, soap, etc. causing redness or watery eyes after contact. Is not contagious.

How It Spreads / Prevention:
<u>Viral and Bacterial</u>:
Spread by touching infected eye discharge, then touching eyes or sharing contaminated items (towels, pillows, toys). Prevention tips include:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
- Avoid touching or rubbing the eyes.
- Don't share towels, washcloths, pillows, or eye drops.
- Clean surfaces that are touched often (doorknobs, toys, counters).
- Older children/teens:
    - Contact lens wearers: follow strict cleaning and stop using contact lenses until the eye is healed.
    - Avoid eye makeup on the affected eye

<u>Allergic:</u>
Caused by eyes being exposed to allergen (pollen, dust mites, animal dander, etc).
Prevention tips include:

- After being around allergen (Ex: playing outside), wash hands before touching face
- For more significant outdoor allergies, change clothes or shower off after coming inside
- Try to limit exposure to known allergens (keep windows closed on high pollen days, dust regularly).
- For allergic conjunctivitis, your child's provider may suggest antihistamine eye drops (like Pataday or Zaditor) and/or oral allergy medicines (like Zyrtec, Claritin, or Allegra)

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Reference: American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and HealthyChildren.org,

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How to Treat & Help Your Child Feel Better

At-home care for all causes

- Use a **clean, warm compress** (soft cloth soaked in warm water) on the closed eyelids to help loosen crustiness and soothe irritation.
- Gently **wipe away discharge** with a clean, damp cloth (use a fresh cloth each time).
- Use over the counter, **lubricating (artificial tear) drops** to reduce dryness or grittiness (check with your child's provider first).
- Pain relievers, such as **acetaminophen or ibuprofen** (as appropriate for the child's age & per label instructions) can be used for discomfort or swelling.

When antibiotics are used

- If the provider judges that the cause is bacterial, **antibiotic eye drops or ointment** may be prescribed.
- Antibiotics can slightly shorten symptom duration, but many bacterial conjunctivitis cases improve without them.
- Always **complete the full course** of antibiotics if they are prescribed.

Viral vs. Bacterial Conjunctivitis: Key Differences

Feature	Viral	Bacterial
Which eyes?	Often starts in one eye and spreads to both	Usually starts in one eye, may spread but often stays in one
Discharge	Watery or clear, sometimes with mild crusting	Thick, yellow or green discharge that can cause eyelids to stick together
Other symptoms	May occur with cold, runny nose, sore throat	Usually not associated with cold symptoms
Eye appearance	Red, watery, irritated	Red with noticeable pus or crusting
Contagious?	Yes, very contagious (like a cold)	Also contagious, but less often spreads person to person
Treatment	Supportive care: artificial tears, warm compresses, handwashing	Often treated with antibiotic drops or ointment
Duration	5–7 days, may linger up to 2 weeks	Typically improves within a few days of starting antibiotics

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When to Call or Make an Appointment

Contact your child's pediatrician promptly if you notice:

- Symptoms that **don't improve within 2–3 days**, or worsen after a week (if untreated)
- Worsening redness, swelling, or pain around the eye
- Sensitivity to light or trouble looking at bright light
- Changes in vision or inability to open the eye fully
- Eye trauma or foreign object in the eye
- For infants (especially <1 month), any red eye or discharge should be seen immediately

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