

Nurse's Corner

Spirit Lake Community Schools

Spirit Lake School Nurses are committed to promoting the health and well-being of all students so that they may achieve academic success and develop lifelong healthy habits!

PINK EYE (Conjunctivitis)

What is pink eye (conjunctivitis)?

There are 3 main types of pink eye;

- Viral Conjunctivitis
 - Most common and very contagious
 - Often caused by the same virus as the common cold
 - Usually causes a burning/gritty feeling, red eyes, and a watery discharge
 - Usually starts in 1 eye and spreads to the other eye in 1-2 days
 - Symptoms worsen over the first 1-3 days and then gradually improve

- Bacterial Conjunctivitis
 - Also contagious, but less so than viral conjunctivitis
 - Infection caused by bacteria
 - Usually causes a thick, sticky discharge along with eye soreness and redness. Also may cause puffy, swollen eyelids

- Allergic Conjunctivitis
 - Not contagious
 - Caused by an allergic reaction to pollen, dust, animals, smoke, pool chlorine, car fumes, or other environmental stimuli
 - Occurs in both eyes and causes eyes to become itchy, watery, and red

How do I get pink eye (conjunctivitis)?

Viral and bacterial conjunctivitis are contagious and spread through direct contact with an infected person's bodily fluids, usually through hand-to-eye contact. Pink eye can also be caused by not cleaning contact lenses properly..

Allergic conjunctivitis is not contagious and is spread through contact with environmental allergens such as pollen, dust, animals, smoke or chemicals.

How do I treat pink eye (conjunctivitis)?

Treatment for pink eye (conjunctivitis) depends upon the type that you have. Good news: the majority of cases of pink eye are caused by a virus and will get better on its own over time!

Viral conjunctivitis: There is no specific treatment for conjunctivitis caused by viruses. Your body will fight the virus on its own. Like a cold, the symptoms may get worse for the first couple days, then stabilize, then gradually improve. Antibiotics do not work on viruses and are not warranted. Placing a cool, wet washcloth on your eyes can help them feel more comfortable along with saline eye drops

Bacterial conjunctivitis: If caused by a bacterial infection, your doctor may prescribe antibiotic drops that you will instill several times per day, usually for 5-7 days. Mild cases of bacterial conjunctivitis often resolve on their own without antibiotic medication, however. Use warm wash clothes to remove matter in eyelashes and eye discharge.

Allergic conjunctivitis: Typically resolves once the allergen is removed. If due to continuous exposure to environmental or seasonal allergies, may benefit from talking to provider about OTC medications such as Claritin, Allegra or Zyrtec or trying OTC eye drops such as Pataday, Visine, or Zaditor

How do I prevent pink eye?

- Wash your hands often!
- Try not to touch your eyes
- Use a clean tissue each time you wipe your nose/eyes
- Bacteria can live in makeup and cause pink eye. Do not share makeup, do not use eye makeup when you have an eye infection, and replace makeup every 3 months or per product recommendations
- Make sure you clean and replace your contact lenses as recommended. Do not wear contact lenses until pinkeye is resolved

Do I need to stay home from school with pink eye?

Kids with pink eye don't need to be excluded from school if they are able to keep their hands out of their eyes and remember to wash their hands frequently. This may be difficult for preschool children and it may be wise for them to stay home until symptoms have improved. Pink eye is like a runny nose of the eyes- if your child has a mild case and no fever or other symptoms, it is fine for them to be at school. As stated above, most cases of pink eye are caused by a virus and will resolve on their own over a couple days.

If you have any questions, please contact the school nurses:

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