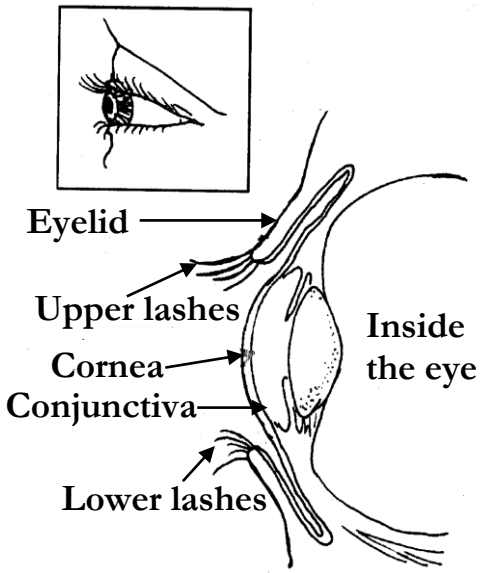
NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.℠

Helping Hand™

Conjunctivitis (Pinkeye)

Conjunctivitis (con junk tiv EYE tis), or "pinkeye", is an inflammation of the conjunctiva. The conjunctiva is a clear membrane that covers the white part of the eye and the inner part of the eyelids (Picture 1).

Conjunctivitis may be caused by germs (viruses or bacteria), an allergy or by something that gets into the eye. Conjunctivitis caused by germs is very contagious. The germs are passed from one person to another by touching the infected eye or tears and then touching a healthy eye. If you think your child has conjunctivitis, it's best to see a doctor right away.



Picture 1 Side view of the eye. The conjunctiva covers the white part of the eye and inner part of the eyelids.

Symptoms

Conjunctivitis usually begins in one eye and may spread to the other eye. Symptoms include:

- White part of the eye appears red or pink
- The eye feels "sandy" or "gritty"
- Pus (white or yellow discharge from the eye) or clear fluid that's usually worse in the morning
- Crustiness around the eye after sleeping, or an eye that is sealed shut after sleeping
- Puffiness around the eyes
- Eyes are sensitive to light

What to Do at Home

- Wipe any discharge from the eye with a clean, wet tissue. Start near the nose and wipe toward the ear. Blot the eye dry with a clean, dry tissue. Throw away the used tissues in a plastic bag and tie it closed.
- If the doctor prescribes antibiotic eye drops or ointment, apply as directed while your child has symptoms. Keep using the drops at least 3 days after the symptoms are gone.
- Do not use the eye drops or ointment for more than 2 weeks. Refer to the Helping Hand: *Eye Drops,* HH-V-14, or *Eye Ointment,* HH-V-20.

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What to Do at Home, continued

- Do not touch the infected eye with the eye dropper or the tip of the eye ointment. This may get germs in the medicine.
- Apply cool compresses to the eyes. Cold water on a clean washcloth works well.
- The child may need to wear sunglasses when in the sun.
- Children with contact lenses need to switch to glasses for a while to prevent damage to the cornea of the eye.

How to Prevent the Spread of Infection

- Frequent hand washing by all family members will help prevent the spread of conjunctivitis.
- Do not share towels and washcloths.
- Wash all towels and washcloths in hot, soapy water.
- Do not share bed pillows until the infection is gone.
- When wiping the eyes, use only unscented facial tissues that can be thrown away after each use. Do not use handkerchiefs.
- Do not use the same tissue to wipe both eyes.
- Do not wear eye makeup until the eyes are healed. It's best to throw away eye makeup and buy new makeup after the eyes are healed.
- Do not wear contact lenses until the eyes are completely healed. Clean the contact lenses well with contact lens solution before you use them again.
- Do not return to school or childcare until the prescribed eye medicine has been used for at least 24 hours.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your child's doctor if any of the following occurs:

- No improvement after 3 days of using the prescribed medicine.
- Eye movement becomes painful.
- Eyes become painful or especially sensitive to light.
- Vision is blurred and repeated blinking does not help.
- Eyelids become swollen and red.
- Another family member has symptoms of conjunctivitis.

If you need a doctor for your child, call the Nationwide Children's Referral and Information Line at (614) 722-KIDS.