



# COUNTY OF KENOSHA

Dennis R. Schultz  
Department of Human Services

Frank G. Matteo, Director  
Division of Health  
8600 Sheridan Road., Suite 600  
Kenosha WI 53143-6515  
Phone: (262) 605-6700  
Fax: (262) 605-6715

## CONJUNCTIVITIS FACT SHEET

### What is Conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis, also known as “pinkeye”, is an inflammation of the conjunctiva which is the mucous membrane lining the inner surfaces of the eyelids and the anterior part of the sclera. The cause may be an environmental irritant (i.e., smog, cigarette smoke, swimming pool chlorine, etc.) or an allergy to something in the air (i.e., pollens, etc.). Infectious conjunctivitis is caused by either a viral or bacterial infection and is highly contagious.

### Who gets Conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis can affect people from all socioeconomic levels without regard to age, sex or race. Without proper identification and treatment, it can spread very quickly through school classrooms, offices and households.

### How does Conjunctivitis spread?

Conjunctivitis is spread by direct contact with the discharge from the eye(s) or upper respiratory tracts of infected people. It can also be spread by indirect contact with contaminated fingers, clothing and other articles. These would include shared eye makeup applicators, multiple-dose eye medications and inadequately sterilized medical instruments, etc. Mechanical transmission can occur via flies and gnats.

### What are the symptoms of Conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis may affect one or both eyes. A person infected with Conjunctivitis may experience eye burning and itching, sensitivity to light and swelling of the eyelid(s). The white parts of the eyes (the conjunctivae) may become pink or red. There may also be a pus-like discharge that can crust over and “glue” the eye(s) shut upon awakening.

### How soon do symptoms appear?

When Conjunctivitis is caused by a bacterial infection symptoms usually appear between 24 and 72 hours after exposure. When Conjunctivitis is caused by a viral infection symptoms may appear anywhere from 5 to 12 days after exposure.

When is a person able to spread Conjunctivitis?

An infected person is able to spread Conjunctivitis during the active stage of the infection, when the infection is caused by bacteria. When Conjunctivitis is viral in nature, an infected person may be able to spread it from before the onset of symptoms until about 14 days after symptoms develop. Individuals should remain home from school or work if eyes are draining. Individuals who are prescribed medication for Conjunctivitis, should remain home until the day after medication is begun. If the eye(s) is/are slightly pink during the convalescent period, the individual may still return to school, work, etc.

How is Conjunctivitis diagnosed?

Confirmation of clinical diagnosis of Conjunctivitis is made by microscopic examination of a stained smear or culture of the eye discharge. This is required to differentiate bacterial from viral or allergic Conjunctivitis.

What is the treatment for Conjunctivitis?

Treatment for bacterial Conjunctivitis includes the local application of an ointment or drops containing a sulfonamide such as Sodium Sulfacetamide, Gentamicin or combination antibiotics such as Polymyxin B with Neomycin or Trimethoprim. There is no specific treatment for viral Conjunctivitis, however warm compresses applied to the eyes and over-the-counter eyedrops may offer some relief of irritation. These measures can help soothe the eye(s) but cannot cure the Conjunctivitis.

What can be done to prevent the spread of Conjunctivitis?

If symptoms of Conjunctivitis develop, individuals should see their health care provider for early diagnosis and proper treatment. Treatment regimen should be followed as prescribed by the physician. Infected individuals should keep their eyes wiped free of discharge by using paper tissue. Eyes should be wiped one at a time with a separate tissue for each eye. Tissues should be discarded promptly after use. You should thoroughly wash your hands anytime you wipe/touch your eyes. Wash/disinfect anything that touches an infected individuals eyes, (i.e., washcloths, towels, binoculars, toys and cameras, etc.). Individuals should avoid the use of communal eye droppers, medicines, eye makeup, instruments, towels, etc. and should minimize hand-to-eye contact. Health education regarding proper hand-washing and personal hygiene is also very important.