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Pink Eye- Information for Parents

What is pink eye (conjunctivitis)?

Pink eye, medically termed conjunctivitis, is an inflammation or infection of the eye that has many different causes including viruses, bacteria, allergies, or objects in the eye. The most common causes of pink eye are viral and bacterial infections. Pink eye is an irritating and fairly common condition, but rarely causes long term eye or vision damage.

Viral conjunctivitis- usually affects only one eye, which has excessive watering and a light discharge. Crusting on eyelids sometimes occurs. Viral conjunctivitis is contagious, and like other viruses, antibiotics can't treat it. Unless there's a special reason to do so, doctors don't normally prescribe medication for viral conjunctivitis, because usually it clears up on its own in a few days or weeks. Artificial tears eye drops and warm or cold compresses can help alleviate some of the discomfort.

Bacterial conjunctivitis- often spreads to both eyes and causes a heavy discharge, sometimes greenish. Crusting may appear on eyelids. Bacterial conjunctivitis is contagious. Antibiotic eye ointments or drops may help eliminate it.

Allergic conjunctivitis- causes itching, redness and excessive tearing in both eyes. The nose also may be stuffy, itchy and runny. Allergic conjunctivitis is not contagious; it occurs when irritants such as allergens, dust and smoke are in the environment. Artificial tears may dilute irritants in the eye's tear film, and antihistamine allergy pills or eye drops also may help control symptoms. Children may remain at school if conjunctivitis is due to allergies.

Additional symptoms of viral or bacterial conjunctivitis include eye pain, increased tearing, itching of the eye, and sensitivity to light.

How is pink eye spread?

- Direct contact with the infected person's eye drainage or drainage from the person's cough, sneeze, or runny nose
- Indirect contact with objects that may have the infected person's drainage on them (i.e. eye makeup applicators, towels, shared eye medications)
- Contact with the infected person's fingers or hands which may contain the virus or bacteria

When can my child return to school?

Parents should minimize exposure to other children and staff by keeping their child with pink eye home until the contagious stage has passed. The child's doctor can advise when the contagious stage has passed, usually three to five days after a diagnosis.

If the school nurse suspects your child has pink eye and sends him/her home, we ask that the child remains home for **at least 24-48 hours** until symptoms are noticeably improved **OR** a written note is received from the child's doctor stating the child is okay to return to school earlier. For bacterial conjunctivitis, a child may return to school 24 hours after starting antibiotic ointment or drops.