

## CONJUNCTIVITIS

### What is it?

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the thin, clear membrane (conjunctiva) that covers the white of the eye and inside surface of the eyelid. It may be caused by bacteria, viruses or an allergy.

### How do you know someone has it?

The eye(s) usually look pink and may discharge. This discharge may be watery or thick with mucus and pus causing the eyelids to stick together. The person often complains of gritty and sticky eye(s), especially in the morning. Viral conjunctivitis is normally characterised by sudden onset of pain or the feeling of dust in the eyes. The eyelids are swollen and tender. Infection may begin in one eye but usually spreads to both.

### Is it infectious?

**Yes**, conjunctivitis is commonly spread from person to person by direct contact with infected discharge from the eyes, in droplets coughed or sneezed into the air, or on hands, towels and washcloths. Conjunctivitis is infectious as long as symptoms are present.

### What is the incubation period?

Symptoms appear 12 hours to 3 days after contact with an infectious person.

### Is there any treatment?

Yes, eye ointments or drops containing antibiotics (prescribed by the Doctor) applied to the affected eye(s) work well for bacterial conjunctivitis. There is no specific treatment for viral conjunctivitis, but bathing the eyes may be soothing.

### What should you do if someone has the illness?

The person should be seen by a Doctor. Apply eye ointment or drops as prescribed. Throw away ointment/drops left after treatment is finished. Never share the treatment with others. Do not share flannels, towels, eye make-up applicators etc. Use separate pieces of damp cotton wool to gently clean each eye as often as necessary and throw away after use. Discourage rubbing of the eye(s). Wash hands before, between and after touching the eyes.

### How long should the person be excluded from work/the care setting?

The best way to stop infectious conjunctivitis from spreading is to make sure hand washing happens after touching or treating infected eyes. Depending upon nature of employment, there may be a need for exclusion until treatment has commenced or the eye appears normal. The Health Protection Agency advises that you do not need to stay away from school/work as long as the condition is being treated unless the child feels unwell or there are a number of cases at the setting. In these circumstances you may be advised to keep your child/ren away from school until their infection has cleared up.

