

## Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye) Fact Sheet

Information for Healthcare Workers

### What is Conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the conjunctiva which is the membrane that lines the eye. When blood vessels in the conjunctiva become swollen and irritated, they become more visible, causing the whites of the eye to appear pink/red and giving it the name pink eye.

### Conjunctivitis can be caused by:

#### Contagious Causes

Viral: Can be caused by several viruses but most often caused by adenovirus.

Bacterial: Can be caused by several types of bacteria.

#### Non-Contagious Causes

Allergens: Bodies reaction to an allergen such as pollen.

Irritants: Chemicals, contact lens wear, foreign bodies (loose eyelashes), smoke, dust, etc.

### Typical signs and symptoms of conjunctivitis include:

- Red eye(s)
- Purulent discharge that causes eyelids to be matted together
- Itchiness in one or both eyes
- A gritty feeling in one or both eyes
- Decreased vision
- Eyelid swelling and pain
- Viral conjunctivitis is often accompanied by cold-like symptoms (sore throat, runny nose, fever, etc.)



### How is Conjunctivitis Transmitted?

Bacterial and viral conjunctivitis are both very contagious. They are spread by hand to eye contact with hands or objects that are contaminated with infected eye discharge. Viral conjunctivitis can also be spread by respiratory droplets.

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### To prevent spreading to others

- Don't touch your eyes with your hands
- Wash your hands often
- Use a clean towel and washcloth daily
- Don't share towels or washcloths
- Change your pillowcases often
- Throw away old eye cosmetics, such as mascara
- Don't share eye cosmetics or personal eye care items

### Treatment for Conjunctivitis

Prince Edward Island residents can have a red/pink eye assessment by an Optometrist free of charge. You can call an Optometrist's office to set up an appointment if you are experiencing symptoms.

Bacterial conjunctivitis is treated with antibiotic drops or ointment to shorten infection and prevent spreading. Antibiotics are not effective for viral conjunctivitis, instead, the virus needs time to run its course. This typically takes around 2-3 weeks. If conjunctivitis is caused by herpes simplex or varicella, it can be treated with antivirals.

### Work Restrictions

Healthcare workers with bacterial conjunctivitis can return to work after 24 hours of antibiotic treatment **and** improvement in symptoms.

Healthcare workers diagnosed with viral conjunctivitis will be excluded from direct patient contact until 14 days after the start of symptoms. If diagnosed with viral conjunctivitis in both eyes, the excluded period will be 14 days from when the infection started in the second eye. Lab personnel who use microscopes should be reassigned to other duties.

If exposed to conjunctivitis but non-symptomatic, there are no work restrictions or modification of work practices.