

Conjunctivitis

This leaflet explains what conjunctivitis is, how it will affect your child and how the infection is treated. If you have any questions or concerns that aren't answered here, please speak to one of the nursing staff.

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the thin, clear membrane (conjunctiva) that covers the white of the eye and the inside surface of the eyelid. The inflammation can be caused by an allergy but is most commonly caused by infection by bacteria or viruses. Most cases of infective conjunctivitis are not serious and will clear up very quickly but if the infection is caused by a herpes virus or a bug called chlamydia, it can be more serious and need special treatment.

Is it contagious?

Yes. Conjunctivitis is usually spread by direct contact – on hands, towels and washcloths as well as by droplets coughed or sneezed into the air. Conjunctivitis is infectious as long as the symptoms are present.

How do I know if my child has conjunctivitis?

It may start in one eye but usually spreads to both. The eye(s) will look pink and watery and your child may complain of feeling grit or dust in their eye(s). The eyelids may become swollen and are often stuck together with gluey material after sleep.

What is the treatment for conjunctivitis?

If the infection is very mild, you may not need to do anything – tears contain chemicals that fight off bacteria and the infection may clear on its own. Ideally discuss with a pharmacist before seeing your GP. Normally, the doctor will prescribe antibiotic eye drops or ointment. You should first wipe away any discharge with a clean damp cosmetic pad before gently pulling the lower eyelid down and putting in the prescribed amount of drops or ointment. Antibiotic treatment is only effective for bacterial infection. If your child has a viral infection you can bathe the eye with cool clean water to soothe the eye until the infection clears up. Bathing the eye may help soothe all forms of conjunctivitis.

Make sure you wash your hands after touching each eye and do not share towels, washcloths etc until the infection has gone. You should also never share eye drops or ointments and should throw them away once the infection has gone.

Are there any possible complications from conjunctivitis?

If the infection is caused by herpes or chlamydia, the conjunctivitis is likely to be more serious and will need special treatment. If your child's symptoms do not settle within a few days or if symptoms change or get worse, you should contact your GP.

Sometimes, it is difficult for a doctor to tell the difference between conjunctivitis caused by an infection and by an allergy. This may be a problem during the hay fever season when red, watery eyes are common. Some other eye conditions also cause red, watery eyes. If the conjunctivitis doesn't clear up within a few days of seeing a doctor you will need to make another appointment to investigate further.

How soon can my child return to school?

They should be well enough to go back to school after a few days of treatment when the swelling and watering have gone and the eye(s) appear normal again.

More information

www.nhs.uk/conditions/conjunctivitis-infective/pages/introduction.aspx

NHS 111. You should use the NHS 111 service if you urgently need medical help or advice but it's not a life-threatening situation. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Your GP's tel number: _____

You should always see a GP rather than attending Accident and Emergency.

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust
London Road, Reading RG1 5AN
0118 322 5111 (switchboard)
Visit the Trust website at www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Paediatric Unit, May 2014
Reviewed : Tony Knox April 2017
Review due: April 2019