

Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis is an eye condition where the clear membrane that covers the white part of the eye and lines the inner surface of the eyelids (the conjunctiva) becomes red and swollen. People can also be sensitive to bright lights. The most common causes are infection, allergy and irritation. Only infectious conjunctivitis can spread to others.

Infectious conjunctivitis can be caused by bacteria or viruses. Bacterial conjunctivitis may start in one eye, but almost always involves both eyes. There is likely to be a gritty feeling and thick white, yellow or green pus. Viral conjunctivitis may have a thinner, clear discharge. It may involve one or both eyes, making them red, itchy and watery.

How it spreads

Infectious conjunctivitis can easily spread from person to person. It spreads by direct contact with eye secretions, or by contact with towels, washcloths or tissues that have eye secretions on them.

Exclusion period

Exclude until discharge from the eyes has stopped (unless a doctor has diagnosed non-infectious conjunctivitis).

Actions for educators and other staff

Follow the exclusion period in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Ensure staff and children have good hand hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Actions for parents and carers

Take your child to a doctor for diagnosis and treatment – viral and bacterial conjunctivitis can look the same but have different treatment options. Encourage your child to wash their hands regularly. Keep your child at home if the conjunctivitis is infectious (bacterial or viral).

More information about conjunctivitis

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of conjunctivitis (healthdirect.gov.au/conjunctivitis).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.