Conjunctivitis

Summary

- Conjunctivitis is an infectious eye condition
- Symptoms last from two days to three weeks
- Children with conjunctivitis should be kept home from school
- You will remain infectious as long as you have an eye discharge.

Conjunctivitis is a common infection especially among children under five.

Children with conjunctivitis must be kept home from school or day care until the discharge from their eyes has stopped. This will prevent the spread of infection to other children. The incidence of conjunctivitis decreases with age.

Conjunctivitis symptoms

Conjunctivitis leads to:

- Eye irritation and redness
- Excessive tears in the eyes
- A discharge with pus
- Swelling of the eyelids
- Photophobia (you can’t tolerate looking into sunlight).

The symptoms usually develop within 24 to 72 hours of becoming infected and last from two days to three weeks.

How you develop conjunctivitis

You could develop conjunctivitis if you come into contact with:

- Discharge from the eyes, nose or throat of an infected person
- Contaminated fingers or objects.

Conjunctivitis can be transmitted from an infected mother to her baby during vaginal delivery.

Confirming that you have conjunctivitis

Your doctor will take a sample of the discharge from your eye. This will be examined under a microscope or grown in a culture to determine if it is conjunctivitis.

Antibiotic eye drops are necessary

If you develop conjunctivitis you will need antibiotic eye drops or ointment to:

- Treat the infection
- Help prevent the spread of conjunctivitis.

You will remain infectious as long as there is a discharge from your eye.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit, Department of Health Victoria Tel. 1300 651 160.
- Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital.

Things to remember

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
• Conjunctivitis is an infectious eye condition
• Symptoms last from two days to three weeks
• Children with conjunctivitis should be kept home from school
• You will remain infectious as long as you have an eye discharge.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:
Department of Health and Human Services - RHP&R - Health Protection - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au