



# Infectious Conjunctivitis - "Pink-Eye" Health Information Sheet

Viral conjunctivitis is an infection of the membrane lining the eyes called the conjunctiva. If the infection also affects the cornea (kerato-) it is called keratoconjunctivitis

Proper personal hygiene is key to preventing infection:

- Hand-washing
- Not sharing towels and toilet articles
- Limiting hand-to-eye contact

Treatment is supportive with the main goal of preventing the spread to other individuals

## WHAT IS VIRAL CONJUNCTIVITIS?

Viral conjunctivitis is an infection of the thin, transparent layer that lines the inner eyelid and covers the white part of the eye, called the conjunctiva. If the front transparent part of the eye, called the cornea (kerato-) is also infected, the condition is called keratoconjunctivitis. The infection causes inflammation of the eye, which makes it appear pink or red, so it is commonly called "pink eye" or "red eye". Infectious conjunctivitis, less often can be caused by bacteria, and there are also non-infectious causes of conjunctivitis, such as from allergies, irritants, or trauma.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- Acute onset of a watery discharge
- Redness in eyes
- Eye discomfort
- Pain or sensitivity to light
- Gritty or scratchy feeling in eyes
- Tender lymph nodes
- Cold symptoms may be associated with some cases

## HOW IS IT CONTRACTED?

Viral conjunctivitis is very contagious and can spread quickly in communities such as workplaces or schools where individuals are in close proximity to one another. Spread of the disease is through direct contact with eye secretions of an infected person and indirectly through contact of contaminated surfaces.

## HOW CAN IT BE PREVENTED?

Although conjunctivitis is very contagious some easy steps can be taken to lower your risk. Good hygiene can help prevent the spread of conjunctivitis.

- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly, especially after interacting with someone who may have an infection
- Do not share towels, washcloths, or pillowcases with others

- Do not share cosmetics, tissue, or eye drops with others
- Keep hands away from your eyes

## TREATMENT

Viral conjunctivitis is a mild illness and will usually go away by itself in one to six weeks. Treatment is supportive. Since there are other causes of conjunctivitis that might require specific treatment, you should contact your local health clinic or provider for information if you have signs or symptoms of conjunctivitis for further guidance on being evaluated.

Part of the treatment is to prevent the spread of the infection to others, through good hygiene as identified above, and may often require avoiding direct contact with other people for a week after symptoms start.

## SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT CONJUNCTIVITIS?

You may have heard of recent news stories of German Army installations being closed because of an outbreak of viral conjunctivitis in German troops. This outbreak has not affected any US personnel. The German Army has closed several of their installations to limit the spread of this disease. There have been no reports of increased infections in the general German population. By following the preventive steps above, i.e., hand washing and not sharing items, you can reduce the likelihood of this and other infections.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact your local health clinic or health care provider.

General information may also be obtained from the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine - Europe at DSN 486-8113 or Comm 06371-86-8113.