

## Conjunctivitis

**Definition:** Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the lining that covers the white of the eye and lines the undersurface of the eyelid.

**Symptoms:** The inflammation is accompanied by redness of the white of the eye. In addition, there is an accumulation of pus in the eye. This discharge may cause the eyelids to stick together, especially during sleep. The eyes may tear, redden, feel gritty or sandy, and burn. The eyelids may swell as well. Conjunctivitis can affect persons of all ages, not just children.

**Causes:** Conjunctivitis can be caused by infection, allergies, or an irritant in the eye. Infectious conjunctivitis is highly contagious. The infection is spread through direct contact with discharge from the eye or through indirect contact with objects handled by the infected individual.

**Treatment:** Contact your physician for treatment. Infectious conjunctivitis will respond readily to treatment and often antibiotic eye drops will be prescribed. Avoid non-prescription eye drops as they can often make the condition worse. If diagnosed as infectious by a physician, children should be kept home from school for at least 24 hours after the treatment has been started.

Do not rub the eyes. The infection can be spread from the infected eye to the uninfected eye by rubbing. Practice proper hand washing in order to prevent spreading the infection. Wash the eyelids with warm water to remove extra secretions or crusting. However, be careful not to spread any fluid from one eye into the other.

**Prevention:** Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water  
Do not put any foreign substances in the eyes  
Do not forcefully rub the eyes  
Avoid close personal contact with those infected  
Avoid contact with objects handled by the infected person (i.e. towels, make up, toys)