

Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis (red or pink eye) is an eye condition caused by infection or allergies.

You usually do not need treatment if you're an adult. But your child might need to see a GP or have urgent treatment. If your baby is less than 4 weeks old, contact your GP.

Some sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can cause conjunctivitis. This type takes longer to clear up.

Symptoms of conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis usually makes your eyes:

- bloodshot
- itchy, gritty or sore
- produce pus that sticks to lashes
- swollen
- water

You or your child might also have flu-like symptoms. For example, sore throat, runny nose, cough, fever, aches and pains.

Get help now for your child

Take your baby to your GP if you think they have conjunctivitis. Do this immediately if your baby is less than 24 hours old.

Get an urgent GP appointment or go to the emergency department (ED) if

your child has symptoms and:

- is less than 4 weeks old
- is in severe pain
- has blurry vision, even after you've cleaned their eyes
- might have something in their eye, such as sand or grit

- has a rash - your child could have an infection like [measles](#)
- wears contact lenses
- feels more pain when looking at light (photophobia)

Contact your GP if your child:

- has one or two red eyes for more than 2 days
- has painful or uncomfortable eyes for more than 2 days
- is distressed by conjunctivitis symptoms
- has [sticky eyes](#) for 2 weeks or more

Get help for yourself

Go to the emergency department (ED) or ask your GP for an urgent appointment if

you have conjunctivitis and:

- pain in your eyes
- changes in your vision, like wavy lines or flashing
- intense redness in one eye or both eyes

These can be signs of a more serious eye problem.

See your GP if

you have conjunctivitis and:

- you wear contact lenses and have symptoms as well as spots on your eyelids – you might be allergic to the lenses
- your symptoms have not cleared up after 2 weeks

Check if it is contagious

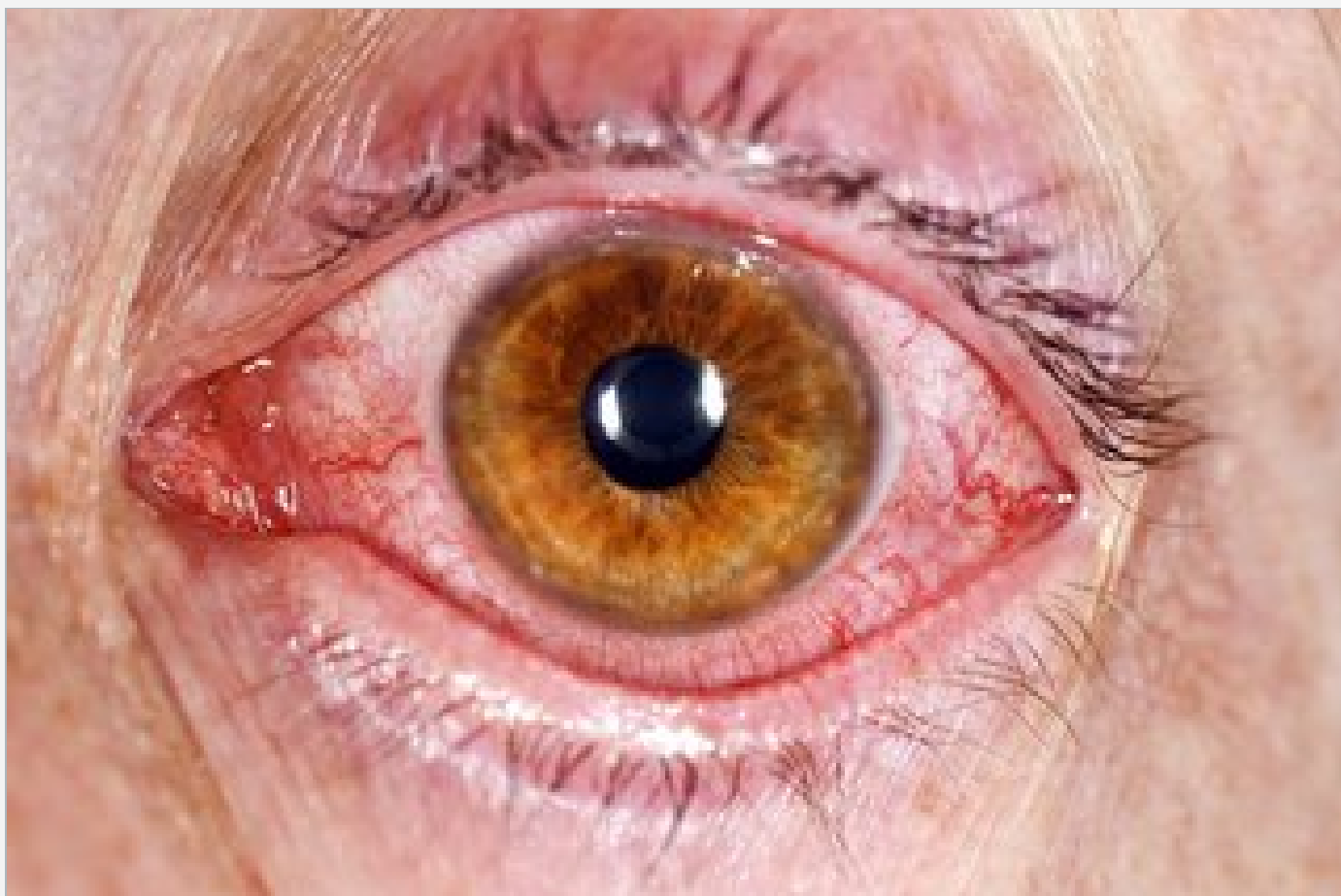
Conjunctivitis can be contagious.

When it is caused by allergies like [hay fever](#), conjunctivitis can make the eyes red and watery but it is not contagious. Other conditions can also cause red eyes.

Use the following images to check if your conjunctivitis is contagious so you can avoid spreading it.



Conjunctivitis that produces sticky pus is contagious. Credit: DR P. MARAZZI/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY



If eyes are red and feel gritty, the conjunctivitis is also usually contagious. Credit: DR P. MARAZZI/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY



Conjunctivitis caused by allergies like hay fever makes eyes red and watery but is not contagious. Credit: DR P. MARAZZI/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY



Conjunctivitis in a newborn baby

Do

- ✓ make sure you and your child wash your hands often with warm soapy water
- ✓ wash your child's hands immediately if they touch their eyes
- ✓ tell your child not to touch or rub their eyes
- ✓ wash pillows and face cloths in hot water and detergent

Don't

- ✗ do not wear contact lenses until your eyes are better
- ✗ do not share towels and pillows
- ✗ do not rub your eyes

Staying away from work or school

You do not need to avoid work or school unless you or your child are feeling very unwell.

Check with your childcare provider that they can look after your child if your child has conjunctivitis.

Treatment from a GP or pharmacist

Treatment for conjunctivitis depends on the cause.

Your GP might prescribe:

- antibiotic eye drops - if the cause is a bacterial infection
- antihistamine medicines - if the cause is an allergy

Your pharmacist can also give you advice. Check that you know the cause of the conjunctivitis. Antibiotics do not work on conjunctivitis caused by a virus or an allergy.

Your GP or pharmacist will tell you how to ease the symptoms at home if you have conjunctivitis caused by a virus.

Treating conjunctivitis at home

You can help ease symptoms by cleaning around your eye and removing crusts from the eyelashes.

Use the following steps to remove any discharge.

1. Boil some water and let it cool.
2. Wash your hands.
3. Wet a clean cotton ball or pad with the cooled water.
4. Gently wipe from the inner corner to the outer corner of the eye.
5. With a dry cotton ball or pad, wipe from the inside corner out.
6. Repeat for the other eye. Use a new cotton ball or pad.
7. Wash your hands.

You can also hold a cold flannel on your eyes to cool and soothe your symptoms.

Using breast milk to treat your child's conjunctivitis

There is no evidence that putting breast milk in your baby's eyes clears conjunctivitis. But it is unlikely to cause harm.

Never put formula milk into your baby's eyes.

Sláintecare.

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HSE Live - we're here to help

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