

Conjunctivitis or Pinkeye in Children

Conjunctivitis or pinkeye is a common problem in school going kids. The eyes become red, itchy, and swollen. There can also be a discharge of gooey liquid from the eye which can be of the color white, clear, green or yellow. Conjunctivitis is also known as pinkeye because the eye's white part turns pink or red. When the child experiences itchiness and redness in the eyes, he/she should inform the elders as soon as possible, as pinkeye is very contagious and spreads very easily.

It is possible that only one eye can get affected by conjunctivitis, while the other eye does not. In usual cases, both the eyes get infected. Conjunctivitis doesn't hurt usually, but the eyes sure do itch badly. There can be a sensation similar to an eyelash or tiny particle getting in the eye, which can be very annoying. The infection lasts for about a week and usually goes away by itself. But if the itching is very troublesome, it should be treated with medicine. Some children can have conjunctivitis accompanied with ear infections, as the bacteria responsible for causing pinkeye is also responsible for causing ear infection.

Conjunctivitis is caused by virus or bacteria. Viruses which cause conjunctivitis are also responsible for cold. Bacteria which cause conjunctivitis also cause ear infection. Conjunctivitis spreads by touching. If a person touches the hand of the infected person, who has recently touched his eyes, also gets the infection. And since infected children deal with their parents and children, they also pose the risk of getting the infection. The prevention in this case is to wash hands often with warm water and disinfecting soap. Conjunctivitis when caused by bacteria & virus, and is contagious is known as infectious conjunctivitis. Conjunctivitis can also be caused due to allergies or because of entry of irritating foreign body into the eyes. Conjunctivitis caused by this medium is not contagious.

A doctor should be approached upon if the itchiness is very irritating. The doctor will check the eyes for redness and liquid discharge. The doctor would ask about the encounter with any friend or known person who seemed to have pinkeye or whether the conjunctivitis was caused because of some allergy or entry of foreign object into the eye. The doctor can also check the ears for the possibility of ear infection. If the pinkeye is caused because of bacterial infection, the doctor will recommend antibiotic eye ointment or drops. Usually infants are given eye ointment, whereas children and adults are given eye drops. The parents should put the drops or ointment into the child's eyes four to five times a day for nearly seven days or so. The dosage and timings should be maintained to get rid of the infection completely.

If the conjunctivitis is caused due to virus, there is nothing much the antibiotics can do. And if the pinkeye is caused by allergies or any foreign object, the doctor can recommend special eye drops to deal with the allergy symptoms. Warm water can also be splashed on the eyes to ease the itching. A cool or warm washcloth can be used to clean the discharge. Parents can clean the eyes carefully with cotton balls and warm water and remove the crusty stuff which is formed at the ends of the eyes. The towels and washcloths used for cleaning should head straight to the laundry so that the infection doesn't spread to other family members.

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Word Count 578