



MARSHFIELD CLINIC®

PINKEYE (CONJUNCTIVITIS)

WHAT IS IT?

When does it require an antibiotic?

Does my child need to stay home from school or daycare?

Pinkeye is a condition medically known as conjunctivitis. By definition, pinkeye is an inflammation of the mucous membrane, the underside of either the upper and/or lower eyelids, and the covering of the white portion of the eye. Many people think that pinkeye is treated with an antibiotic. That is not always the case. It depends on the cause of the pinkeye and the symptoms.

There are three causes of pinkeye – allergic, viral, and bacterial. Itching or tearing is common with all three types.

- Pollens, dust, or other materials can cause *allergic* pinkeye. If the cause of the pinkeye is allergic, the child does not need to be excluded from school.
- *Viral* pinkeye is self-limited (it goes away on its' own). It is **not** treated with antibiotics. Children with viral pinkeye do not need to be excluded from school/daycare.
- *Bacterial* pinkeye is an infection with pus like (yellow or green) discharge. This type will usually need to be treated with antibiotics. If bacterial pinkeye is diagnosed and treated with antibiotics, the child may return to school/daycare after 24 hours of antibiotic use.

Viral pinkeye is spread in the same way as a common cold. Listed below are ways to decrease or limit the spread of pinkeye.

- Frequent hand washing in warm, soapy water, and good hygiene
- Proper disposal of paper tissues used for wiping nasal or eye secretions
- No sharing of towels, washcloths, pillows, or cosmetics such as mascara/eyeliner

Keep the child comfortable.

- Apply a cold or warm compress several times a day to relieve discomfort.
- Gently wipe edge of eyelid with a warm, moist cotton ball to remove crusted matter. Use a fresh cotton ball each time for each eye.
- Do not wear contact lenses or eye makeup until symptoms are gone.

Some schools and daycare centers may insist that all children with pinkeye be on antibiotics. This policy is unwise because:

- it may facilitate antibiotic resistance (the antibiotic becomes ineffective at treating the infection)
- there is a possibility of an allergic reaction to the antibiotic
- treating with an antibiotic may delay the appropriate medical evaluation of this child for a more serious condition

Children should see their doctor if any of the following conditions occur.

- The pinkeye has lasted more than 7 days.
- Any clear discharge from the eye changes from clear to a green or yellow color.
- There are signs of a more serious illness such as vision changes, sensitivity to light, eye pain, fever, redness or swelling around the eye, a body rash, or possible ear pain.
- There is concern that the child may have a foreign body in the eye.

If you have any questions about the information in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact your child's healthcare provider.