

Conjunctivitis

Last Reviewed January 2004

Definition: Conjunctivitis is usually caused by a bacterial or viral infection or by an allergic reaction. The most common bacterial causes of conjunctivitis are *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, *Haemophilus influenzae*, and *Staphylococcus aureus*. Symptoms of bacterial infections are mucopurulent or purulent discharge. Gonococcal, chlamydia and herpes infections can also cause conjunctivitis. Viral conjunctivitis is common and most often caused by enteroviruses. A common symptom of viral infection is serous discharge. Allergic conjunctivitis is more often found in both eyes simultaneously and itching is common. Chemicals such as those in chlorine and soaps or air pollutants can cause irritant conjunctivitis.

The incubation period is 1 – 12 days. Bacterial conjunctivitis usually lasts 1 week and viral about 2 weeks.

Role of the school/school nurse: Educating a student with bacterial or viral conjunctivitis is important in preventing its spread. These students should be encouraged to:

- Wash hands often and well and always after touching the affected eye.
- Keep hands away from the infected eye.
- Must not share eye drops, tissues, washcloths, towels, pillowcases, or handkerchiefs etc. with others, including family members.
- Use washcloth, towel, and pillowcase only once and wash them thoroughly.
- Must not use other people's eye cosmetics.

Exclusion from school: Student with suspected conjunctivitis with discharge should be excluded until their health care provider has examined them and approved readmission. The AAP Red Book suggests that students return to school after appropriate evaluation or treatment has been implemented. It also suggests that student's who are unable to avoid close contact with other students, may be excluded.

Reporting to BOH: Report outbreaks of conjunctivitis.

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