

An Urgent Case for Pink Eye Treatment



By Peter Lamelas, MD, MBA, FACEP, FAAEP

Almost every parent can recall that alarming moment when your child walks in the room with a crusty painful eye that won't open. Conjunctivitis, more commonly known as pink eye, is one of the most common childhood afflictions, but should not be treated with the same nonchalance as a case of the sniffles.

According to Robert Hage, MD Now Urgent Care Physician Training Program Director, pink eye is a highly contagious condition and should be treated sooner rather than later to avoid spreading throughout the entire family. Of the more than 180,000 patients seen annually, MD Now treated approximately 2,400 patients last year in South Florida for conjunctivitis.

What is Pink Eye?

The conjunctiva is the transparent membrane that lines the eyelids and the whites of one's eyes. Normally tears help protect this delicate membrane by washing away dirt and bacteria. If irritation or infection occurs, the conjunctiva becomes red and swollen resulting in red, tender eyes. Pink eye is caused by a number of different irritants, including allergies, air pollutants, or chemicals in chlorine, soaps, etc. The most serious case, however, is

when a virus or bacteria is the cause. This kind of pink eye will not go away on its own and must be treated as soon as possible to stop further infection.

Signs You Should See a Doctor

It can be difficult to tell what kind of pink eye your child has by the symptoms alone, so it is important to visit your doctor for a complete evaluation. The following is a list of symptoms seen across all types of pink eye infections:

- Pink or redness in the white of the eye
- Burning, itchy feeling in the eye
- Thick, milky discharge from the eye
- Sensitivity to light and wind
- Difficulty in opening eyes due to a thick, crusty discharge

If the pink eye is caused by a bacterial infection, your doctor can prescribe antibacterial eye drops. If you're having trouble administering the medicine, try putting the drops on the inner corner of your child's eye. When he or she blinks, the medicine will flow over the rest of the eye. If eye drops aren't an option, your doctor may also recommend an antibiotic ointment. The ointment is applied to where the two eyelids meet then quickly melts and enters the eye. If your child has allergic conjunctivitis, your child may only need an anti-allergy medication, which can be administered as pills, liquid, or eye drops.

While waiting for the medication



to take effect, use cool or warm compresses and acetaminophen or ibuprofen to make your child feel more comfortable. You can also clean the infected eye gently with warm water and gauze to remove the painful crusts of dried discharge.

Preventing Pink Eye in Your Children

It would be convenient to visit the doctor once and chase away

those nasty bacteria forever. However, even with antibiotic eye drops or allergy treatment, the bacteria or virus may linger. To prevent pink eye from spreading MD Now physicians urge you and your children to wash hands frequently or use an alcohol sanitizer, especially after touching or rubbing the infected eye. Also moms and teenaged daughters should throw away any make-up and all family members should toss disposable contact lenses that may have been contaminated.

Preventative care will also go a long way in helping you avoid a trip to the doctor. "Change your pillowcases frequently and never share eye makeup, towels, or handkerchiefs and your chances of contracting pink eye decrease immensely," says Hage. Furthermore, Hage cautions that a child should not go back to school until he or she has been symptom free for 24-48 hours.

If your children toddle in on Easter morning with pink, teary eyes it's likely not just excitement that has them worked up. Even on holidays, MD Now Urgent Care physicians can see your family members for pink eye at any of their 15 or more urgent care centers located throughout South Florida – open seven days a week, even on holidays. Your family can be treated from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and can avoid spreading the infection to the rest of your family with a quick trip to seek urgent care.

