

# Infective conjunctivitis

## Information for patients, parents and guardians

We have given you this factsheet because your child has been diagnosed with infective conjunctivitis. It includes what infective conjunctivitis is, how it is treated and how you can reduce the spread of infection. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. Please ask any of our staff if you have further queries or need help while you are with us.

### What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is the infection or inflammation of the outer layer of the eye (the conjunctiva). It can occur if your child has a cold, or if they have been near other children or adults with a cold or conjunctivitis. It is not usually serious, but it can affect both eyes and can be easily spread from child to child.

### What are the signs and symptoms?

Your child's eyes may become red, sticky or watery. They may also be itchy, sore and uncomfortable. Older children may say that their eyes feel gritty or complain of a burning sensation.

There are two types of conjunctivitis:

- Bacterial - signs include a yellow or green discharge from the eyes throughout the day.
- Viral - signs include a watery discharge from the eyes. Your child may also have some sticky discharge from their eyes in the morning.

In both cases your child's eyelids may also be swollen.

### Treatment

Bacterial conjunctivitis is treated with antibiotic drops. Your child's doctor may prescribe an antibiotic called chloramphenicol. If your child is under two years of age, an antibiotic called fucithalamic may be prescribed instead. You should apply both of these drops as prescribed by the doctor.

Viral conjunctivitis will not respond to antibiotics, so your child will not be prescribed these. The virus will usually go away by itself without treatment (though the infection may last up to two to three weeks).

In some cases, your child's doctor may also prescribe a lubricating gel or drop, or anti-inflammatory steroid drops.

You can clean your child's eyes with a tissue or cotton pad with sterile water.

### Self care at home

Conjunctivitis is very contagious. You can reduce the spread of infection by:

- changing flannels, towels and pillow cases daily
- not sharing flannels or towels with other members of the family
- not sharing eye drops with any other child or family member
- encouraging your child to wash their hands often
- washing your hands before and after giving eye drops or caring for your child

- checking with your child's school or nursery about whether it is ok for them to attend while they have conjunctivitis
- completing the course of eye drops
- wiping down surfaces or toys that your child has played with or been in contact with

### **When should I seek further advice or see a doctor?**

Bacterial conjunctivitis should start improving after three days of antibiotics. If you feel your child's condition is not improving after this time, or is getting worse, please phone the eye casualty triage line.

Viral conjunctivitis lasts longer than bacterial conjunctivitis and may not improve for seven to ten days.

Please bring your child to the eye casualty immediately if they develop any of the following symptoms:

- very swollen eyelids
- constant blurry vision (not cleared by blinking)
- painful eyes
- temperature above 38°C

Please visit your GP or attend your nearest emergency department if you have any concerns about your child, or if your child:

- is lethargic (has a lack of energy), sleepy or floppy
- is irritable or has a high-pitched cry
- is breathing rapidly or has a fast heart rate
- looks pale
- is vomiting
- has a temperature above 38°C
- is off their feeds or not eating and drinking

### **Contact us**

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the eye casualty team.

Eye casualty triage/advice line  
Telephone: **023 8120 6592**

The triage/advice line is available 24 hours a day. However, after 7pm the voicemail will advise you that the eye casualty is closed. In this instance, please listen to the full message and select the option for the 'eye short stay unit'.

Eye casualty offers a walk-in service between 8am and 6pm. After this time, please call the number above.

Eye casualty  
Level B (eye unit)  
Southampton General Hospital  
Tremona Road  
Southampton  
SO16 6YD

### **Useful links**

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/conjunctivitis](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/conjunctivitis)

[www.bupa.co.uk/health-information/eyes-sight/conjunctivitis](http://www.bupa.co.uk/health-information/eyes-sight/conjunctivitis)

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone **023 8120 4688** for help.

[www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrenshospital](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrenshospital)

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