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# Factsheet on Conjunctivitis

## What is Conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis means inflammation of the eye.

## What causes conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis may be caused by bacteria, viruses or occasionally allergy to a particular substance.

## How does conjunctivitis present?

The eye appears red and may feel 'gritty', with a watery or yellow discharge. One eye is usually involved at first but both eyes are usually affected within a few hours.

## How long does conjunctivitis last?

The infection may last for 2-3 weeks; many patients have no more than redness of the eyes and a slight discharge for a few days.

## What is the treatment?

Topical antibiotic drops are often used for treating bacterial eye infections. Conjunctivitis resulting from viral infection will improve without treatment.

## Is it necessary to keep my child away from school or nursery?

Exclusion of single cases from school/nursery is not generally necessary. It may be necessary if an outbreak occurs.

## How does conjunctivitis spread?

Conjunctivitis spreads most commonly by contact with the discharge from the eye or upper respiratory tract of infected persons. Contaminated hands, clothing or other articles, including sharing eye make-up applicators, or multiple dose eye medications are the vehicles by which organisms may reach another person.

### **How may the spread of conjunctivitis be prevented?**

- Good standards of hand washing and drying;
- Personal hygienic care and appropriate treatment of the affected eye;
- Avoid sharing equipment such as make-up applicators;
- Do not use contact lenses whilst infection is present.

### **How long does it take to develop symptoms?**

This is variable depending on the cause, usually 1-3 days for bacteria, 1-12 days for viruses and longer for certain eye infections in small babies.

### **When is it infectious?**

Usually from the time symptoms appear until they have resolved. Some patients with viral infections may be infectious for up to 14 days after symptoms start.

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Please Note:

If you would like further advice, but are not from the Essex area, please contact your local Health Protection Team. Details can be found at <http://www.hpa.org.uk/HPAWebHome/> and search by entering your postcode in 'Health protection services in your region'.