

VIRAL CONJUNCTIVITIS

Conjunctivitis is an infection of the mucous membrane, called the conjunctiva which covers the sclera, the white part of the eyes and inside the eyelids.

It usually affects both eyes at the same time, sometimes starting in one eye, then spreading to the other eye in a day or two. It may affect one eye more than the other.

Conjunctivitis is a very common eye condition for which there are many causes. Viral infection is just one cause and is very common. It is not serious but can be uncomfortable and irritating and often lingers on for several weeks.

Viral conjunctivitis is often associated with an upper respiratory tract infection, or common cold, or a sore throat, or fever. This may be caused by a virus called “**adenovirus**”. This type of conjunctivitis is very infectious, can spread rapidly between people and may cause an **epidemic of conjunctivitis**.

Signs and symptoms of Viral Conjunctivitis

- Red eyes
- Watery discharge, maybe crusty on waking
- Discomfort or soreness of the eyes
- “cold” symptoms
- Sometimes tender swollen lymph nodes around the ear or in the neck (small hard lumps you can feel with your fingers)

This type of conjunctivitis may also spread to affect the cornea (the transparent window at the front of the eye) and may persist for several weeks.

How is Viral Conjunctivitis treated?

There is no effective treatment for viral conjunctivitis, just like the common cold. However, the eye can be made to feel more comfortable by using a lubricant ointment, eye drop or gel (artificial tears) and cool compresses. An antibiotic ointment might also help to prevent a secondary bacterial infection. **As viral conjunctivitis is a highly contagious condition it is important to ensure that a strict code of hygiene is adhered to for as long as you have symptoms.**

What can be done to avoid spreading Conjunctivitis?

- Good hygiene of the hands and face is important. **Wash hands frequently.** Avoid touching the face or shaking hands.
- Disinfect hard surfaces i.e. counter tops, door handles etc. with soap and water where hands may touch surfaces.
- No sharing of face cloths and towels.
- Discharge and crustiness should be removed by bathing the eye with boiled, cooled down water which can also lessen the symptoms.
- Use disposable tissues when you dry the eyes and throw them away after use. This will help to limit contamination.
- No swimming until you are better.
- Dispose of your eye drops/ointments when you are better and do not share between other family members.

You will find that your symptoms get worse over the first few days and then gradually improve over the next two to six weeks.