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Following several cases of conjunctivitis in school we have been asked to remind parents of what to do if they think their child has this infection.

Here are the current NHS Guidelines:

Conjunctivitis is a common condition that causes redness and inflammation of the thin layer of tissue that covers the front of the eye (the conjunctiva). People often refer to conjunctivitis as red eye.

- Other symptoms of conjunctivitis include itchiness and watering of the eyes, and sometimes a sticky coating on the eyelashes (if it's caused by an allergy).
- **Eye redness** happens as a result of the inflammation and widening of the tiny blood vessels in the conjunctiva (thin layer of cells that covers the front of the eyes)
- **watering eyes:** the conjunctiva contains thousands of cells that produce mucus and tiny glands that produce tears – inflammation causes the glands to become overactive, so that they water more than usual

Conjunctivitis can affect one eye at first, but usually affects both eyes after a few hours.

What causes conjunctivitis?

The conjunctiva can become inflamed as result of:

- a bacterial or viral infection - this is known as **infective conjunctivitis**
- an allergic reaction to a substance such as pollen or dust mites - this is known as **allergic conjunctivitis**
- the eye coming into contact with substances that can irritate the conjunctiva, such as chlorinated water or shampoo, or a loose eyelash rubbing against the eye - this is known as **irritant conjunctivitis**

Treating conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis often doesn't require treatment as the symptoms usually clear up within a couple of weeks. If treatment is necessary, the type of treatment will depend on the cause. In severe cases, antibiotic eye drops can be used to clear the infection.

Irritant conjunctivitis will clear up as soon as whatever is causing it is removed.

Allergic conjunctivitis can usually be treated with anti-allergy medications such as antihistamines. If possible, avoid the substance that triggered the allergy.

Avoid sharing pillows or towels will help prevent the infection spreading.

Self-care

There are several ways that you can treat infective conjunctivitis at home. The following advice should help ease your symptoms:

- **Remove your contact lenses.** If you wear contact lenses, take them out until all the signs and symptoms of the infection have gone. Avoid using contact lenses until 24 hours after you have finished a course of treatment. Do not re-use the lenses after the infection has passed as the old lens could be a potential source of re-infection.
- **Use lubricant eye drops.** These are available over the counter at pharmacies or they may be prescribed for you. They may help ease any soreness and stickiness in your eyes. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- **Gently clean away sticky discharge** from your eyelids and lashes using cotton wool soaked in water.
- **Wash your hands regularly.** This is particularly important after you have touched your infected eyes and will stop the infection spreading to other people.

See your GP immediately if you have:

- eye pain
- sensitivity to light (photophobia)
- disturbed vision
- intense redness in one or both of your eyes
- a newborn baby with conjunctivitis

Work and school

Public Health England advises that you do not need to stay away from work or school if you or your child has conjunctivitis, unless you are feeling particularly unwell.

If there are a number of cases of conjunctivitis at one school or nursery, you may be advised to keep your child away from the school until their infection has cleared up.

Generally, adults who work in close contact with others, or share equipment such as phones and computers, should not return to work until the discharge has cleared up.