

COVID conjunctivitis

What is conjunctivitis?

The surface membrane of your eye is known as the conjunctiva. It forms a thin transparent layer over the white of your eye and under your eyelids. Conjunctivitis means inflammation of the conjunctiva. It has several causes:

An infection (bacteria or viruses, usually flu or cold viruses) - infective conjunctivitis. This can cause stickiness, watering and discomfort.

An allergy - allergic conjunctivitis. This is usually itchy and can also cause watering.

What are the symptoms of infective conjunctivitis?

Infective conjunctivitis can affect one eye or both eyes. The whites of your eyes can look inflamed, swollen and red.

Your eyes may feel gritty, watery or sticky and your eyelids may become swollen and get stuck together, especially in the mornings. Your vision may be blurred due to tears or sticky discharge.

What can I do?

You can see your pharmacist who can advise over the counter medication.

No treatment— most infections clear up on their own within a few days to a few weeks.

Most causes of conjunctivitis are self limiting and may only need over the counter medication for symptom relief.

Antibiotic eye drops or ointment— viral infections do not respond to antibiotics and the infection may last for two to three weeks before your natural immunity is able to build up enough to clear the virus. Antibiotic drops or ointment may be helpful in conjunctivitis caused by bacteria.

Lubricant eye drops, gel or ointment— these may help reduce discomfort and grittiness, but will not reduce the duration of the illness.

Simple painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen tablets (provided you have no medical reason which prevents you from using non-steroidal painkillers), are available over the counter at a chemist or on prescription and can ease the discomfort and flu-like symptoms.

Regular lid cleaning— you can clean sticky discharge or secretions from your eyes with a clean flannel soaked in warm water.

You may also get flu-like symptoms such as a sore throat, fever, muscle ache, and feel generally unwell with a viral conjunctivitis.

If you have any of these symptoms with a persistent new cough or a fever, then please contact NHS 111 for further advice.

DO NOT ATTEND YOUR GP, PHARMACY OR ACCIDENT & EMERGENCY.

If you have conjunctivitis without a new persistent cough or a fever, you can see your local pharmacist who will be able to advise you about over the counter medication that will be of help.

You do not need to be seen in the Emergency Department unless there is significant reduction of vision or pain or symptoms last more than a few weeks.