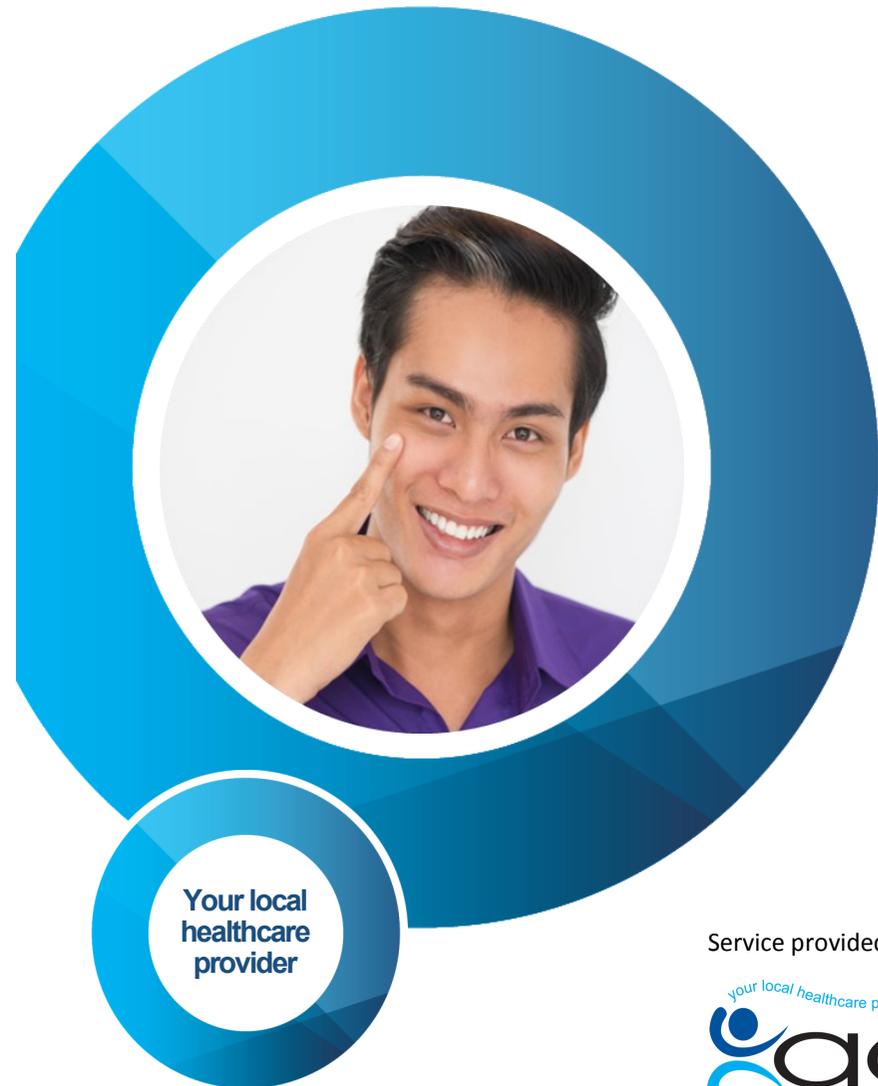


# Conjunctivitis

## Self Care Information



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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).

Read more about the symptoms of conjunctivitis

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 a 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 things that can irritate the conjunctiva, such as shampoo or chlorinated water, or a loose eyelash rubbing against the eye – this is known as irritant conjunctivitis

### Treating conjunctivitis

Treatment isn't usually needed for conjunctivitis, because the symptoms often clear up within a couple of weeks. If treatment is needed, 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, you should avoid the substance that triggered the allergy.

It's best not to wear contact lenses until the symptoms have cleared up. Any sticky or crusty coating on the eyelids or lashes can be cleansed with cotton wool and water.

Washing your hands regularly and not sharing pillows or towels will help prevent it spreading.

See your GP immediately if you have:

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

### Work and school

Public Health England (PHE) advises that you don't need to stay away from work or school if you or your child has conjunctivitis, unless you (or they) are feeling particularly unwell.

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

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

### Complications

Conjunctivitis can be a frustrating condition – particularly allergic conjunctivitis – but in most cases it doesn't pose a serious threat to health.

Complications of conjunctivitis are rare, but when they do occur they can be serious and include:

- a severe case of allergic conjunctivitis can lead to scarring in the eye
- in cases of infective conjunctivitis, the infection can spread to other areas of the body, triggering more serious secondary infections, such as meningitis

