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Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation or infection of the conjunctiva, the outer, normally clear covering of the sclera, and the white part of the eye. The eye appears red/pink in conjunctivitis because the blood vessels are dilated. Often accompanied by a discharge, but vision is usually normal, and discomfort is mild.

Either a bacterial or a viral infection may cause conjunctivitis. Viruses, which are more common and last several weeks, may cause an upper respiratory infection (or cold) at the same time. Unlike viruses, bacterial conjunctivitis is treated with a variety of antibiotic eye drops or ointments, which usually cure the infection in a day or two.

Some forms of conjunctivitis, such as pink eye, can be contagious. People who have it should not share towels or pillowcases and should wash their hands frequently. They may need to stay home from school or work and should stay out of swimming pools. Always ask Dr. Currier if your condition is contagious and if precautions need to be taken.

Not everyone with conjunctivitis has an infection. Allergies can cause conjunctivitis too. Typically, people with allergic conjunctivitis have itchy eyes, especially in spring and fall. Eye drops to control itching are used to treat allergic conjunctivitis. It is important not to use medications that contain steroids (they usually end in "-one" or "-dex") unless prescribed by Dr. Currier.

Finally, not everyone with a red eye has conjunctivitis. Sometimes more serious diseases, such as infections, damage to the cornea, very severe glaucoma, or inflammation on the inside of the eye cause the conjunctiva to become inflamed and pink. Vision is usually normal if the red eye is really conjunctivitis. **If vision is affected, or if the problem does not get better in a few days, call and schedule an appointment with Dr. Currier immediately.**

