

	<b>FALMOUTH VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER'S ASSOCIATION</b> <b>FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES</b> <b><i>SAFETY BULLETIN</i></b>	
	<b>SUBJECT: CONJUNCTIVITIS OR "PINK EYE"</b>	<b>NUMBER:</b> SB08-009
	<b>APPROVED:</b> Kevin Good, Fire Chief	<b>INITIATED</b> 06/2008
	<b>PREPARED:</b> James Morris, Sr., Safety Officer	<b>REVISED</b>

While conjunctivitis is usually a minor problem, it is important for all members to be aware of the signs and symptoms of this illness and have a heightened sense of awareness to reduce transmission. Below are a few frequently asked questions about pink eye.

### **What is conjunctivitis?**

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the thin, clear membrane (conjunctiva) that covers the white of the eye and the inside surface of the eyelids. Conjunctivitis, commonly known as "pink eye," is most often caused by a virus but also can be caused by bacterial infection, allergies (e.g., cosmetics, pollen) and chemical irritation.

### **How is it spread?**

Anyone can get conjunctivitis. It can spread fairly easily from person to person, especially in dormitories, schools or other places where large numbers of persons congregate. People commonly get conjunctivitis by coming into contact with the tears or other eye discharges of an infected person, and then touching their own eyes. Hands, towels and washcloths can spread conjunctivitis. Symptoms normally appear a few days after contact with an infected person or an object contaminated with the virus (such as a towel).

Individuals with conjunctivitis may be contagious as long as symptoms persist or the eye appears abnormal. Risk of conjunctivitis increases with use of contact lenses, and touching/rubbing the eyes without hand washing first.

### **What are the symptoms of conjunctivitis?**

Symptoms may include the following:

- Eye redness and irritation
- Sensitivity to bright light
- Itchiness or a gritty sensation in the eye
- Swollen eyelids
- Tearing and discharge (Discharge may make the eyelids and eyelashes stick together or have crusty debris, especially in the morning.)

Viral conjunctivitis often begins with fairly sudden onset of pain or the feeling of dust in the eye. Infection may begin in only one eye but often spreads to involve both.

Other concerns, including the duration of your conjunctivitis symptoms, whether or not

your symptoms are improving as expected, etc., should also be shared with your health care provider.

### **How is conjunctivitis treated?**

Treatment varies with the cause. Lubricating eye drops sometimes help to ease symptoms. (Do not share these eye drops with other persons.) If symptoms last for more than 24-48 hours, or vision is affected, it is important to be seen by a health care practitioner. Other kinds of conjunctivitis often have specific treatments that may be prescribed.

A person with conjunctivitis should follow these general guidelines:

If medication has been prescribed, use exactly as directed for the full course of treatment.

(All treatments used for conjunctivitis should be thrown away when no longer needed.)

Be sure to wash hands with soap and water before and after using eye medication.

Wash hands frequently during waking hours with soap and water (15 seconds), and use paper towels or blow dry.

Avoid touching your eyes. Gently wipe discharge from the eye using disposable tissues.

Use warm or cool water compresses to reduce discomfort.

### **Should contact lens wearers take special precautions?**

Disinfect lenses, also clean and disinfect storage case.

Do not use eye drops or ointment with the lens in place.

Do not wear contact lenses until eyes are entirely clear of conjunctivitis.

If using disposable lenses, discard; after infection clears, use new lenses.

### **Can conjunctivitis be prevented?**

Practicing good hygiene can prevent conjunctivitis.

Wash hands frequently with soap and water.

Use clean paper towels to dry hands.

Avoid touching the hands of others or rubbing the eyes.

Throw away or machine wash towels, tissues and other items that touch the eyes **after each use**.

Avoid sharing towels and washcloths.

Avoid sharing eye drops, eye makeup, contact lens solution, tissues and other items used on the face.

Thorough housework and good hygiene will be the two greatest factors that we can control to reduce the risk of spread within our department. Remember to clean door handles, telephones, keyboards, and other surfaces that may be overlooked during daily station cleaning.

Additional information can be found at <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/pink-eye/DS00258>

Thanks to Captain David Tobin of Fairfax County Fire & Rescue Department for this information.