

Idaho Falls Pediatrics

Eye Infection: Bacterial

Illustration of conjunctivitis

What is a bacterial eye infection?

When bacteria causes an eye infection, the eye drains a yellow discharge (pus). This condition is also called bacterial conjunctivitis, runny eyes, or mattery eyes.

Your child may have:

- yellow discharge in the eye
- eyelids stuck together with pus, especially after sleeping
- some redness in the white part of the eyes
- puffy eyelids.

Note: A small amount of cream-colored mucus in the inner corner of the eyes after sleeping is normal.

What is the cause?

Eye infections with pus are caused by bacteria and can be a complication of a cold. Pink eyes without a yellow discharge, however, are more common and are due to a virus.

How long does it last?

With proper treatment the yellow discharge should clear up in 72 hours. The red eyes (which are due to the cold) may continue for several more days.

How can I take care of my child?

- **Cleaning the eye**

Before putting in any medicines, remove all the pus from the eye with warm water and wet cotton balls. Unless this is done, the medicine will not have a chance to work.

- **Antibiotic eyedrops or ointments**

This infection must be treated with an antibiotic eye medicine. Putting eyedrops or ointment in the eyes of young children can be a real battle. Ideally it's done with two adults. One person can hold the child still while the other person opens the eyelids with one hand and puts in the medicine with the other. One person can do it alone if she sits on the floor holding the child's head (face up) between the knees to free both hands to put in the medication.

Eyedrops: If your health care provider has prescribed antibiotic eyedrops, put 1 drop in each eye every 2 hours while your child is awake. Do this by gently pulling down on the lower lid and placing the drops there. As soon as the eyedrops have been put in the eyes, have your child close them for 2 minutes so the eyedrops will stay inside. If it is difficult to separate your child's eyelids, put the eyedrops over the inner corner of the eye while he is lying down. When your child opens his eye and blinks, the eyedrops will flow in. Continue the eyedrops until your child has awakened 2 mornings in a row without any pus in the eyes.

Ointment: If your health care provider has prescribed antibiotic eye ointment, the ointment needs to be used just 4 times a day because it can remain in the eyes longer than eyedrops. Separate the eyelids and put in a ribbon of ointment along the lower eyelid from one corner of the eye to the other. If it is very difficult to separate your child's eyelids, put the ointment on the edges of the eyelids. As the ointment melts from body heat, it will flow onto the eyeball. Continue until 2 mornings have passed without any pus in the eye.

- **Contact lenses**

Children with contact lenses need to switch to glasses temporarily. This will prevent damage to the cornea.

- **Contagiousness**

The pus from the eyes can cause eye infections in other people if they get some of it on their eyes. Therefore, it is very important for the sick child to have his own washcloth and towel. He should be encouraged not to touch or rub his eyes because it can make his infection last longer. Touching his eyes also puts a lot of germs on his fingers. Your child's hands should be washed often to prevent spreading the infection.

After using eyedrops for 24 hours, and if the pus is minimal, children can return to day care or school.

When should I call Idaho Falls Pediatrics?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- The outer eyelids become very red or swollen.
- The eye becomes painful.
- The vision becomes blurred.
- Your child starts acting very sick.

Call within 24 hours if:

- The infection isn't cleared up after 3 days of treatment.
- Your child develops an earache.
- You have other concerns or questions.

*NOTE: This information is provided as a public educational service. The information does not replace any of the instructions your physician gives you. If you have a medical emergency please call 911 or call the Hospital at (208) 529-6111. If you have questions about your child's care, please call Idaho Falls Pediatrics at (208) 522-4600.