



Dartmouth College Health Service

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Conjunctivitis (“Pink Eye”)

The Dartmouth College Health Service often sees student cases of conjunctivitis or “pink eye.” The majority of the cases are viral conjunctivitis, which is the most common cause of pink eye and can be triggered by viruses and infections including the common cold. Symptoms of conjunctivitis include red, watery eyes; eye discomfort that feels “itchy” or “scratchy;” and an eye discharge that may form crusts around the eyelashes. Pink eye, although a nuisance that can last 1-5 days, is not a serious disorder.

Recommended self-care for “pink eye”:

You can try applying warm compresses to your eyes for 20 to 30 minute periods, several times a day. Gently wipe away eye discharge and crusts with a clean, moist cotton ball or tissue. A cold compress also can help relieve itching.

If you are a contact-lens wearer, stop wearing contact lenses until your eyes have completely recovered. Mild discomfort is expected. Contact a health professional immediately if you experience any pain.

Since it is a virus, antibiotic drops will not shorten the length of the illness and will not help the symptoms. As a matter of fact, if someone is allergic to the antibiotics, it may actually cause worsening of the redness in the eyes.

If over-the-counter liquid eye drops make the eyes feel better, there is no harm to use them. The vending machine at Dick’s House carries *Artificial Tears*, which could be used to soothe your eyes if you have some irritation.

Other symptoms often associated with the upper respiratory infection can include nasal congestion and some sinus congestion. If you have some symptoms of congestion, over-the-counter decongestants can minimize the symptoms.

Allergies can also cause “pink eye” If you have had a history of allergies and have other symptoms such as itchy eyes and a runny nose, then an antihistamine may be helpful. The vending machine at Dick’s House carries *generic Claritin (loratadine) and Zyrtec (cetirizine) and generic Benadryl*.

What you can do to prevent “pink eye”:

- Wash your hands frequently and avoid touching your eyes.
- Do not share towels, wash cloths or facial cosmetics with others, especially eye makeup.

When to contact Dick's House:

If after 3 days the eye redness is not getting better, it would be worthwhile for you to make an appointment to be seen at the Health Service to rule out the very unlikely possibility that you have a bacterial infection.

If you have pain and/or swelling in your eyes, or if you develop blurred vision, a high fever or light sensitivity, then you should make an appointment to be seen at the Health Service.