



Viral conjunctivitis (red eye)

You came to the emergency department with a red, sore eye. The doctor found that it is most likely viral conjunctivitis, an infection of the thin clear layer over the eye. It usually gets better on its own. This sheet explains how to care for your eye and stop it spreading.

What is it?

Viral conjunctivitis is caused by a virus, often the same kind that causes colds. The eye becomes red, watery and gritty, and the eyelids may be puffy or sticky in the morning. It often starts in one eye and spreads to the other. It usually clears within 1 to 3 weeks. Antibiotics do not help a virus.

Looking after yourself at home

- Wash your hands often, especially after touching your eyes. Try not to rub them.
- Clean the eyelids gently with cooled boiled water and clean cotton pads, one pad for each wipe.
- A cool, damp cloth over closed eyes may ease discomfort.
- Use your own towel and pillowcase, and do not share eye make-up or eye drops.
- Do not wear contact lenses until your eyes are fully better and for a day after.
- It spreads easily. Stay away from work or school while your eyes are very watery, if you can.

Medicines

- Lubricating eye drops from a pharmacy may ease the gritty feeling. Follow the packet or your doctor's instructions.
- For discomfort, you may take paracetamol unless your doctor told you not to. Follow the packet instructions.

Follow-up

- See your family doctor or health centre if your eye is not improving after 1 week.
- See your family doctor sooner if the discharge becomes thick and yellow or green.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- Blurred vision or loss of vision that does not clear when you blink
- Severe eye pain, or pain that keeps getting worse
- Strong pain when looking at light
- Redness and swelling spreading around the eye, with fever
- The redness follows an injury, or a chemical or object in the eye
- You wear contact lenses and the eye becomes painful



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This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

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