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**NOTICE: This health alert provides written guidance for health care professionals and others who may need to take action to prevent or control a notifiable condition. It is not intended to provide guidance for the general public.*

Increased Transmission of Conjunctivitis Among School-Aged Children

Action Requested:

Be aware of significant spread of conjunctivitis in school/daycare settings.

Health Care Professionals:

- Evaluate youth presenting with conjunctivitis for underlying cause. Recommended treatment varies by cause. Advise youth and their families about how to prevent further spread and when to seek urgent medical attention. Please note that infants (4 weeks old and younger), people who wear contact lenses and people who are immunocompromised are at increased risk of severe illness.
- Consider causes of conjunctivitis that may result in severe illness including Kawasaki Disease, herpes simplex virus, varicella zoster virus and measles among others. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conjunctivitis information for clinicians can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/conjunctivitis/clinical.html>

Schools and Child Care Facilities:

- Exclude children from school or childcare and refer to licensed health care provider if there is white or yellow drainage from the eye, altered vision, light sensitivity, severe redness of the eye, eye pain and/or redness of the eyelid or swelling surrounding the eye. Minimal redness to the white of the eye with no other symptoms is not grounds for exclusion. Readmit to school upon licensed health care provider approval (with or without treatment). Individuals who wear contact lenses should be referred to an eye care provider.
- If conjunctivitis is not experienced with fever or other systemic symptoms, a child may be allowed to remain at work or school. However, if symptoms are still present, and work, school or childcare activities include close contact with people, staying home is recommended until eye drainage has resolved or they have been evaluated by a health care provider. Children may remain in school or childcare once any indicated therapy is implemented, except when viral or bacterial conjunctivitis is accompanied by systemic signs of illness.

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- Schools should follow guidance for conjunctivitis found in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Infectious Disease Control Guide for School Staff <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-08/infectiousdiseasecontrolguide.pdf>

Background:

Conjunctivitis is an infection that causes the whites of one or both eyes to appear pink or red. The infection can be caused by a viral or bacterial infection. In some cases, conjunctivitis can be caused by allergens or irritants. General symptoms of conjunctivitis can include pink or red color in the white of the eye(s), swelling of the conjunctiva and/or eyelids, increased tear production, feeling like a foreign body is in the eye(s) or an urge to rub the eye(s), itching, irritation, burning, discharge, crusting of eyelids or lashes, contact lenses that feel uncomfortable or do not stay in place on the eye. Symptoms that are more commonly seen in bacterial infection include discharge (pus) which can lead to eyelids sticking together, one or both eyes affected, can sometimes occur with an ear infection. Symptoms that are more commonly seen in viral infections include discharge from the eye is usually watery rather than thick, usually begins in one eye and may spread to the other eye within days and can occur with symptoms of a cold, flu, or other respiratory infection.

People with conjunctivitis are advised to seek medical care if they have conjunctivitis along with any of the following:

- ✓ pain in the eye(s)
- ✓ purulent drainage
- ✓ swelling around they eye(s)
- ✓ sensitivity to light or blurred vision that does not improve when discharge is wiped from the eye(s)
- ✓ intense redness in the eye(s)
- ✓ symptoms that get worse or don't improve, including pink eye thought to be caused by bacteria which does not improve after 24 hours of antibiotic use
- ✓ a weakened immune system, for example from HIV infection, cancer treatment, or other medical conditions or treatments

Newborns with symptoms of conjunctivitis should be seen by a doctor right away.

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Conjunctivitis can be caused by many different pathogens, some of which are extremely contagious. Transmission usually occurs through close personal contact, aerosol generated particles projected through coughing or sneezing, or touching a contaminated object or surface and then touching your eyes. The incubation period of conjunctivitis varies but is generally within 24-72 hours and individuals remain contagious while they are experiencing tearing and matted eyes. Appropriate treatment of underlying cause of conjunctivitis may shorten the duration of symptoms.

Conjunctivitis can be prevented through several methods which include frequent hand washing, avoiding touching or rubbing eyes, not sharing personal items such as makeup, eye drops, towels, glasses, etc., not using the same eye products for infected and non-infected eyes, not wearing your contact lenses until cleared by a eye care provider, cleaning, storing and replacing contact lenses as instructed by an eye care provider, all pillowcases, sheets, washcloths and towels used by a person with conjunctivitis should be washed in hot water and detergent in a separate load from other laundry, and by thoroughly cleaning objects commonly touched by hands or faces such as doorknobs, telephones and toys.

Limitations

This information is intended to complement existing Washington Administrative Codes (WAC) and Revised Codes of Washington (RCW) and not replace. This information should not be considered all-inclusive regarding conjunctivitis evaluation, infection control and outbreak management.

Resources:

- [Pink Eye \(Conjunctivitis\) | CDC](#)
- [OSPI - Infectious Disease Control Guide](#)
- [Adenovirus | CDC](#)
- [Outpatient Care Guidelines \(CDC\)](#)
- [Infection Control Guidelines and Disinfection of Healthcare Equipment \(CDC\)](#)
- [Infection Control Guidelines & Disinfection Recommendations \(CDC\)](#)
- [List of G EPAs Registered Antimicrobial Products Effective Against Norovirus \(CDC\)](#)

THANK YOU FOR REPORTING

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE UPDATE

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION SECTION
THURSTON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
412 LILLY RD NE
OLYMPIA, WA, 98506-5132
DISEASE REPORTING: (360)786-5470
WWW.THURSTONCOUNTYWA.GOV/PHSS



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TO REPORT A NOTIFIABLE CONDITION IN THURSTON COUNTY	
Voice mail for reporting non-immediately reportable conditions (24 hours a day): Reporting a Notifiable Condition (thurstoncountywa.gov)	Phone: 360-786-5470 Fax: 360-867-2601
Day time immediately reportable conditions – Calls are answered during business hours Monday-Friday 8am-5pm (excluding holidays) and routed to the appropriate communicable disease team member.	Phone: 360-867-2610 Secure eFax: 1-833-418-1916
After hours immediately and 24-hour reportable conditions or a public health emergency	Call 1-800-986-9050
No one is available with Thurston County Public Health and condition is immediately notifiable or a public health emergency	Call 1-877-539-4344

Communicable Disease Updates are posted online at: [Communicable Disease Updates \(thurstoncountywa.gov\)](http://thurstoncountywa.gov)