

What parents need to know about pink eye

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A case of conjunctivitis—also known as pink eye—used to mean a trip to the doctor's office, antibiotics and keeping your child home from school. That's no longer the case. Dr. Marcie Billings, a Mayo Clinic pediatrician, explains what parents should know about this common viral

infection.

"Conjunctivitis is actually an inflammation of the conjunctiva, which is a thin layer of tissue that covers the white of your eye as well as the underside of the lid."

That can lead to inflammation of the blood vessels, which tends to lead to redness. Dr. Billings says most cases are caused by a [virus](#).

"The virus that causes pink eye is essentially the same virus that's causing your [common cold](#)."

Common symptoms include redness in one or both eyes, itchiness or grittiness in the eyes and drainage.

Treating [pink eye](#) no longer includes the use of antibiotics. "Viruses, as we know, don't respond to antibiotics," says Dr. Billings.

Start with supportive care. Use a cool compress on the eye and consider using artificial tears. It also means you don't have to keep your child home from school.

"You would send your child to school if they had a runny, stuffy nose as long as they were able to participate in normal school activities. Pink eye or viral conjunctivitis is no different," says Dr. Billings

You also can manage and prevent the spread of the virus with good hand hygiene. Wash hands often, don't reuse washcloths and change pillowcases often.

Check with your [health care provider](#) if you have concerns, if symptoms don't improve after three days or if your child has eye pain or visual changes.

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