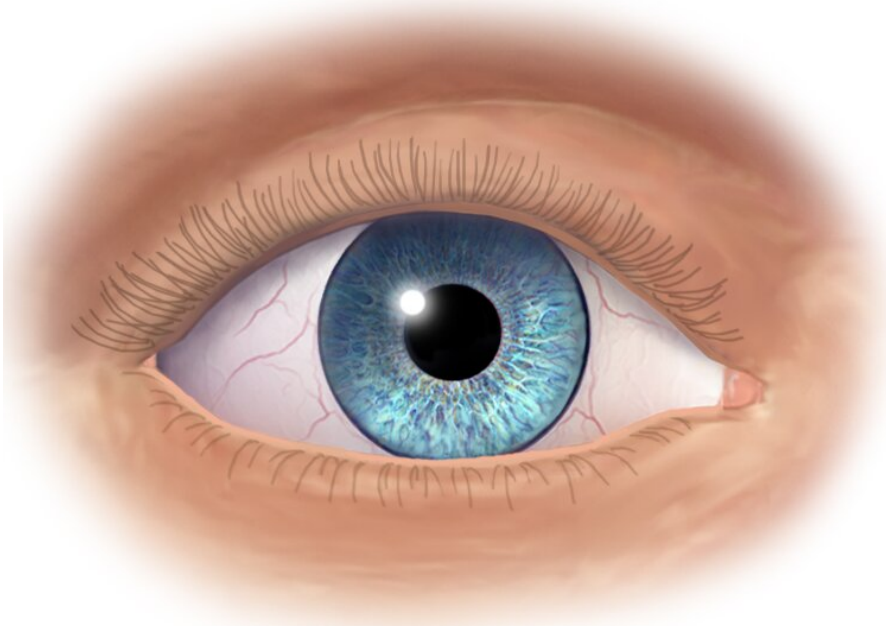


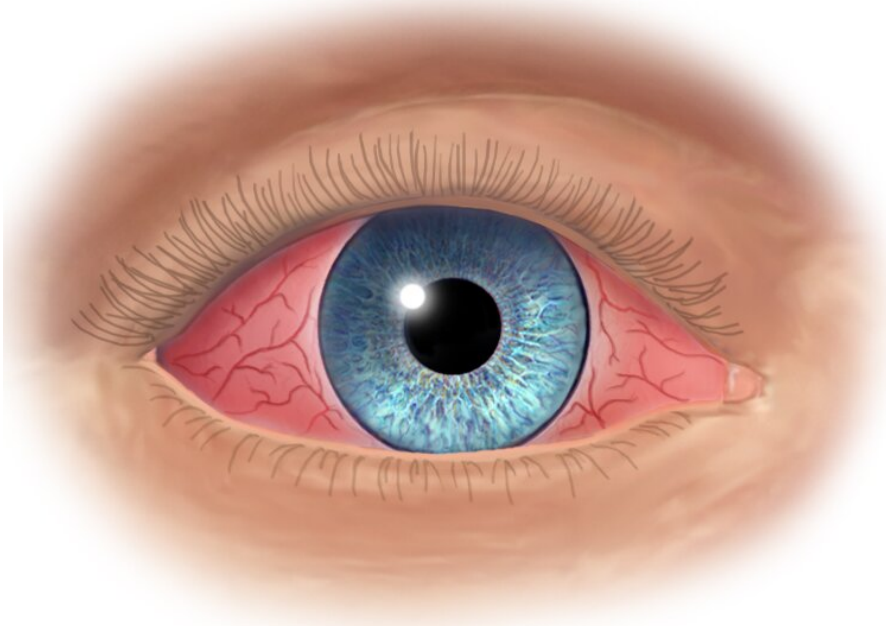
Pink eye may be a sign you have COVID. What to know about the new virus symptom

May 3 2023, by Mary Ramsey

Normal Conjunctiva



Inflamed Conjunctiva



Pink eye

Credit: BruceBlaus, CC BY-SA 4.0 , via Wikimedia Commons

A common and relatively mild malady is yet another symptom people should watch for in the fight against COVID-19, experts say.

Conjunctivitis—commonly known as pink eye and typically brought on by a virus, bacteria or allergies—can be a [symptom](#) of a COVID infection. And public health leaders are emphasizing the importance of taking note of the potential relationship between pink eye symptoms and the coronavirus as a new variant spreads.

Here's what to know about the connection between pink eye and COVID, what symptoms to watch for and when to seek treatment:

Is pink eye a COVID symptom?

"COVID [conjunctivitis](#)," or pink eye, "is one of the ocular manifestations of the coronavirus," per the American Academy of Ophthalmology, and it is a form of viral conjunctivitis.

"There are reports in which conjunctivitis was the only sign of COVID-19," the group says. "Other reports showed that the patients of COVID-19 developed conjunctivitis later in their course of disease after hospitalization."

Research has shown, according to the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Truhlsen Eye Institute, that the COVID-19 virus can be "found in the eye's tear film," triggering pink eye symptoms.

"It's important to note that while eye symptoms have been reported in relation to positive COVID-19 cases, it is uncommon for it to be the only symptom," Nebraska researchers say. "Although pink eye seems to be one of the more common eye symptoms, it occurs in a low percentage of people. Research also indicates it may be more common in people with severe cases of COVID-19."

Recently, pink eye has gotten more attention as a COVID symptom amid the emergence of the XBB.1.16 variant, known as "Arcturus."

In a late April statement, the Los Angeles health department said while "it is too early to know with certainty if XBB.1.16 is truly associated with higher rates of conjunctivitis," it's important to take the symptom seriously in order to limit the variant's spread.

Pink eye symptoms

Common symptoms of pink eye, according to Johns Hopkins Medicine, include:

- "Pink or red discoloration in one or both eyes"
- A "gritty feeling" and/or itching, irritation or burning in one or both eyes
- "Clear, thin drainage of liquid and increased shedding of tears" and/or "stringy and/or thick, white or green discharge from the eyes"
- Eyelid swelling and/or "eyelids that are matted together in the morning"
- Blurred vision

Do you need to go to the doctor for pink eye?

Generally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises, you should go to the doctor if you have multiple symptoms of pink eye and your symptoms "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."

Those with "a [weakened immune system](#), for example from HIV infection, [cancer treatment](#), or other [medical conditions](#) or treatments" should also seek treatment if they're symptomatic, the CDC says.

"Most cases of viral conjunctivitis are mild," the CDC notes, and "the infection will usually clear up in 7 to 14 days without treatment and without any long-term consequences."

"However, in some cases, viral conjunctivitis can take 2 to 3 weeks or more to clear up," the agency adds. "A doctor can prescribe antiviral medication to treat more serious forms of conjunctivitis."

"Mild bacterial conjunctivitis," meanwhile, "may get better without antibiotic treatment and without causing any complications."

"It often improves in 2 to 5 days without [treatment](#) but can take 2 weeks to go away completely," the CDC says.

Antibiotic treatments are "usually given topically as eye drops or ointment."

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Citation: Pink eye may be a sign you have COVID. What to know about the new virus symptom (2023, May 3) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-05-pink-eye-covid-virus-symptom.html>

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