

DHMOSH GUIDANCE FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF ACUTE CONJUNCTIVITIS CASES & OUTBREAKS

DECEMBER 2023

Conjunctivitis (pink eye) is an inflammation of the transparent membrane (conjunctiva) that lines the eyelid and eyeball and can be caused by different viruses, bacteria and allergic reactions. Conjunctivitis due to bacteria or viruses is highly contagious (very easily spread from person to person). As such, infected individuals should be counseled to prevent transmission avoiding close contact with others during the period of contagion. Acute conjunctivitis can affect one eye or both, and, in some cases, vision can become affected if there is corneal inflammation. This document aims to provide guidance to UN medical personnel on the management of acute conjunctivitis cases and outbreaks. For any questions, contact DHMOSH Public Health Section at dos-dhmosh-public-health@un.org

CASE MANAGEMENT OF ACUTE CONJUNCTIVITIS

- Signs and symptoms of conjunctivitis may include itchy eyes and eyelids swelling, tearing, redness and pain, eye discharge, light sensitivity and decreased vision.
- Most cases of acute, infectious conjunctivitis in adults are viral and self-limited; these cases may not require antimicrobial and Antiviral treatment.
- The management of conjunctivitis is symptomatic and should be limited to general measures, such as cold compresses and artificial tears with vasoconstrictors.
- Systemic or topical (drops) antimicrobial agents should not be indicated unless there is a high suspicion/confirmation of bacterial infection. The effectiveness of antivirals has also not been documented.
- Steroidal anti-inflammatory medications should not be used as they significantly increase viral replication.
- Limit contact with infected individuals during the active period of the disease and throughout their communicability period; take precautions regarding exudates and secretions.

INFECTION PREVENTION FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH CONJUNCTIVITIS

The case-patient should be advised to limit its spread to other people by following these steps:

- Wash your hands with soap and water especially well for 40-60 seconds before and after cleaning, or applying eye drops or ointment to, your infected eye (guidance can be found [here](#)).
- If soap and water are not available, use an Alcohol-Based Hand Rub (ABHR) sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol to clean hands. If using ABHR, perform hand hygiene for 20-30 seconds (guidance can be found [here](#)).
- Avoid touching or rubbing your eyes. This can worsen the condition or spread it to your other eye.
- With clean hands, wash any discharge from around your eye(s) several times daily using a clean, wet washcloth or fresh cotton ball. Throw away cotton balls after use, and wash used washcloths with hot water and detergent, then rewash your hands with soap and warm water.
- Do not use the same eye drop dispenser/bottle for your infected and non-infected eyes.
- Wash pillowcases, sheets, washcloths, and towels often in hot water and detergent; wash your hands after handling such items.
- Do not share personal items, such as pillows, washcloths, towels, eye drops, eye or face makeup, makeup brushes, contact lenses, contact lens storage cases, or eyeglasses.
- Do not use swimming pools.

INFECTION PREVENTION FOR INDIVIDUALS EXPOSED TO SOMEONE WITH CONJUNCTIVITIS

Any individual exposed to someone with conjunctivitis should be advised to reduce their risk of infection by following these steps:

- Wash your hands with soap and water especially well for 40-60 seconds before and after cleaning, or applying eye drops or ointment to, your infected eye (guidance can be found [here](#)). If soap and water are



not available, use an Alcohol-Based Hand Rub (ABHR) sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol to clean hands. If using ABHR, perform hand hygiene for 20-30 seconds (guidance can be found [here](#)).

- Wash your hands after contact with an infected person or items he or she uses.
- Avoid touching your eyes with unwashed hands.
- Do not share items used by an infected person; for example, do not share pillows, washcloths, towels, eye drops, eye or face makeup, makeup brushes, contact lenses, contact lens storage cases, or eyeglasses.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS

- Always wear gloves for patient care and use personal protective measures based on point of care risk assessment, a key part of standard precautions.
- Perform hand hygiene after providing care to an individual with probable or laboratory-confirmed conjunctivitis.
- Disinfect furniture and medical equipment to avoid contaminating other patients and/or healthcare workers.
- As a healthcare worker, if you have conjunctivitis and it is suspected or confirmed to be caused by adenovirus, avoid direct patient contact for 14 days after the onset of the disease in the most recently involved eye¹.

REFERENCES

1. Kimberlin DW, Sawyer MH, Lynfield R. Adenovirus Infections. In: Barnett ED, ed. *Red Book: 2021–2024 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases, Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 32nd Edition. American Academy of Pediatrics; 2021.
2. Preventing pink eye (conjunctivitis). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. January 4, 2019. Accessed November 20, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/conjunctivitis/about/prevention.html#print>.