

# Kent County Health Department

## Pink Eye Fact Sheet



### What is pink eye?

Pink eye is an infection of the eye and eyelid caused by a bacteria or virus.

### How do you get pink eye?

Pink eye is highly contagious. The germ is found in the yellowish drainage from the eye. It is passed by coming in contact with the tears or discharge from an infected eye and then touching your eye. It can also be passed from one eye to the other.

Pink eye is often associated with an upper respiratory infection (common cold) and then it can be spread through droplets in the air from sneezing or coughing.

### What are the symptoms of pink eye?

A person with pink eye has these signs:

- Red and swollen eyelid
- Pain or itching in the eyes
- Thick yellow drainage from the eye
- Sensitivity of eyes to light
- Watery eyes

Generally the drainage will form a crust over the eye during the night.

If only one eye is red and swollen, often the other eye will become red and swollen within a few days.

Symptoms appear one to three days after being exposed.

**The Health Department does not  
diagnosis pink eye.**

### How is pink eye treated?

Your doctor may prescribe some eye drops or ointment. Follow the directions carefully. Do not stop using the medicine even if your eye looks better – it may be that the infection is not

completely gone yet even though your eye looks and feels better.

If the drainage makes your eyelashes stick together, especially in the morning, put a warm wet washcloth on your eye to soften the crust. This may need to be repeated several times. Gently clear the crusts from your eyelashes.

Do not scratch or rub your eyes – it will make the infection worse. Use a tissue to gently wipe your eye. Throw the used tissue into a covered wastebasket.

### Do I need to keep my child home from school?

A child with pink eye needs to stay away from others for 24-hours after treatment has begun or until after the drainage from the eye has stopped.

### How can pink eye be prevented?

- Use separate washcloths and towels. Be sure to wash towels and washcloths in hot soapy water.
- Keep hands away from eyes – avoid rubbing and scratching eyes with dirty hands.
- Wash hands often to prevent the spread from person to person especially after touching the infected eyes.

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for talking with a health care provider. If you have any questions about pink eye or think you may have it, call your health care provider.*