

Does COVID-19 Cause Pink Eye?

By now, we have grown accustomed to the symptoms and side effects of COVID-19, including fever, cough, shortness of breath, body aches, loss of taste and smell, and so on. What you may not know is that COVID-related conjunctivitis (pink eye) is also a concern for some – especially for those with young children. While pink eye in and of itself is not believed to be a symptom of COVID-19, some early studies do show a correlation between the two.

If your child contracts pink eye, it is important to first be able to know the different [types of pink eye](#), as not all are considered viral; the category in which COVID-related pink eye falls and the most contagious of the three. Dr. Safiat Amuwo, an OSF HealthCare pediatrician, breaks it down.

“Generally speaking, we have allergic conjunctivitis, viral conjunctivitis, and bacterial conjunctivitis. A lot of times, bacterial conjunctivitis does require antibiotics. In any case, you can always go to your provider and ask questions. We will ask about the onset, the symptoms, and see if it is in both eyes or just one eye, or if there is any discharge,” says Dr. Amuwo.

Viral infections have been known to cause pink eye in people for years, especially in children. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), some of these conjunctivitis-causing viruses include adenoviruses and common colds, rubella virus, and rubeola (measles) virus. According to the American Optometric Association (AOA), viral conjunctivitis can occur as the virus spreads along the body's own mucous membranes, which connect the lungs, throat, nose, tear ducts and conjunctiva (eye tissue).

The CDC says that pink eye usually spreads from an infected person to others through close personal contact (such as touching or shaking hands), through the air by coughing and sneezing, and by touching an object or surface with germs on it – then touching your eyes before washing your hands. This is in large part why it spreads more frequently among children, as they may tend to skip or speed up their hand washing time, or may forget to cover their mouths properly when sneezing or coughing.

However, the new studies on the correlation between COVID-19 and pink eye have some parents wondering how they will know if their child simply has pink eye, or if there might be more going on. So, at what point should COVID-19 be a concern?

“There is most definitely a correlation between red eye or pink eye and respiratory infections in general. If the parents are concerned – and if the child has other symptoms like cough, diarrhea, and things like that – I would suggest to go ahead and get a COVID swab just to be protective and to see if it does require some type of treatment, and to see if it is something can spread easily among family members or school children,” Dr. Amuwo explains.

Dr. Amuwo says that while pink eye in and of itself is not a huge concern, parents should be vigilant if their child does have COVID-19, and observe the proper COVID-19 protocols in order to reduce the spread to others, such as wearing a mask and isolating at home.

Pink eye treatments can vary just as widely as its causes. Dr. Amuwo adds that it is important to know what type of pink eye your child has so the appropriate steps are taken to treat it.

“Usually, most pink eyes are viral and they don't require medication. A lot of times if parents come to the provider because they do want antibiotics. Just know that they are not always recommended – especially if it is viral. So if your child has pink eye but they also have a runny nose, they have a cough, they have congestion, it is more likely to be viral as opposed to bacterial,” says Dr. Amuwo.

And while eye drops can be beneficial, it is important to use the right type of eye drops for your child. Dr. Amuwo advises to talk to your child's pediatrician before using eye drops to find out what he or she recommends.

“I would recommend not going to a local drug store like Walgreens or CVS to get eye drops. Sometimes that can actually worsen the symptoms depending on what is in the eye drops. It is always best to go to their provider and ask them what the best form of treatment is,” Dr. Amuwo advises.

The CDC says the best way to prevent the spread of pink eye is by following steps such as washing your hands frequently, avoiding touching or rubbing your eyes, and washing pillowcases and washcloths. If you are concerned that your child has pink eye, or that it may be COVID-related, make an appointment with your child's doctor.