

Media Release General Health Information – April 26th, 2023

Rise in Pink Eye Infections

Conjunctivitis - commonly known as “pink eye” is the inflammation of the thin lining that covers the eyelid and eyeball called the conjunctiva. What many people do not realize is that “pink eye” is a blanket term for this condition and that there are several causes that can contribute to an eye infection or short-term eye redness, including allergies, viral infections, or bacterial infections.

Dr. Melanie Dombrowski, a local Optometrist, owner of Salisbury Eyecare and Eyewear, and a Rowan County Board of Health member, reported that her practice has seen an uptick in conjunctivitis caused by viral infections in the last several weeks. Dr. Dombrowski has indicated that this viral infection behaves like Epidemic Keratoconjunctivitis (EKC) and is particularly worrisome. Unfortunately, antiviral medications have not been shown to be effective against viral conjunctivitis, leaving EKC to run its course until it clears up on its own.

EKC is a painful eye condition. Pain can be managed through various methods including cold compresses, artificial tears, and topical cycloplegic medications to alleviate significant complaints of light sensitivity.

EKC is known to have significant economic impacts because of the length of time symptoms can last. Symptoms have been known to last for over two weeks for some individuals causing missed work and school.

Symptoms include

- Redness;
- Swelling of the eyelids;
- Sensitivity to light;
- Clear, watery discharge;
- Blurred vision;
- Eye pain, or a feeling that something is in your eye.

Occasionally, people may also experience more severe symptoms such as fever, headache, extreme tiredness, and swollen lymph nodes. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, please contact your primary care provider or your Optometrist for a confirmatory diagnosis.

Like any chronic or communicable illness, prevention is key. EKC is very contagious, but taking the proper precautions can reduce your risk of contracting and or spreading the infection to others.

If you have Pink Eye/Conjunctivitis

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after cleaning, or applying eye drops or ointment to your infected eye;
- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol to clean hands;
- Avoid touching or rubbing your eyes;
- With clean hands, wash any discharge from around your eye(s) several times a day using a clean, wet washcloth or fresh cotton ball;
- 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.

To avoid reinfecting yourself, be sure to throw away or replace any eye or makeup products used while infected. For items that cannot be replaced, such as long wear contact lenses and eyeglasses, clean as directed.

If you are around someone with Pink Eye/Conjunctivitis

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds;
- 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, pillows, washcloths, towels, eye drops, eye or face makeup, makeup brushes, contact lenses, contact lens storage cases, or eyeglasses.

Vaccinations

Unfortunately, there is no vaccine that can treat or prevent EKC, however staying up the date on the following vaccines can help to protect against other viral and bacterial diseases associated with conjunctivitis:

- Rubella
- Measles
- Chickenpox
- Shingles
- Pneumococcal
- Haemophiles influenzae type b (Hib)

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