

Ophthalmology department

# Bacterial conjunctivitis

## Information for patients, relatives and carers

### Introduction

This leaflet has been designed to give you information about bacterial conjunctivitis and answer some of the questions that you or those who care for you may have. It is not meant to replace the discussion between you and your medical team but aims to help you understand more about what is discussed. If you have any questions about the information below, please contact us

### What is bacterial conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is an infection of the conjunctiva. This is the mucous membrane that covers the white part of the eye called the sclera. The infection is caused by the bacteria irritating the surface of the membrane.

### Signs and symptoms

Symptoms typically develop in one eye but may spread to the other. You may see or feel some or all the following:

- swollen eye lids
- red eye lids
- a gritty/sandy feeling when you blink
- opaque discharge and subsequent crusting

### Treatment

Bacterial conjunctivitis usually resolves (gets better) without treatment. However, you may be prescribed antibiotic eye drops or an eye ointment.

You can use a clean flannel soaked in warm water to remove sticky discharge and secretions from your eyelids. Simple over-the-counter painkillers may help relieve some of the discomfort or any flu-like symptoms you experience.

There is usually no follow-up appointment required but if the condition is particularly severe, an appointment to come to the clinic may be arranged.

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## Contact lenses

You should **not** wear contact lenses until the symptoms have cleared completely.

## How you can help yourself

If you are particularly sensitive to light, wearing dark glasses may help.

The infection is highly contagious. So, anything in contact with your tears or secretions from your eyes is at risk of infection.

### **Please use your own and do not share the following:**

- towel
- flannel
- pillowcase

Change them as often as possible.

Do not touch your face.

Wash your hands frequently.

When using ointment and eye drops do not let the nozzle touch your eyes or eye lashes.

You may need some time off work. Children should not go to school for at least one week or until their eye no longer looks red or sore.

## Who you can contact for more information

- Outpatients at Western Eye Hospital – 020 3312 3236
- Outpatients at Charing Cross Hospital – 020 3311 1109/ 1233/ 0137
- Emergency department at Western Eye Hospital – 020 3312 3245

## How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pals@nhs.net) The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

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Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street  
London W2 1NY

Email: [ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net)

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:  
[imperial.communications@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.communications@nhs.net)

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