



NISD Nurse Notes

December, 2019

The lowdown on PINK EYE

Pink eye is a term that is commonly used, especially in the school setting. However, not every pink eye should cause panic. Eyes can be pink for many reasons including viral infection, bacterial infection, irritation from smoke or dust, allergic reaction, surface scratches and irritation from contacts.

In Texas, "allergy eyes" are common due to the wind and dryness. To make that worse, when eyes itch, children rub them, causing more irritation to the surface of the eye and blood vessels.

In the school setting, students are frequently sent to the nurse for "pink eye." It would not make sense to send every student with a red eye home. Your school nurse will also look for other signs and symptoms that could tell her whether this is contagious.

For example, if both eyes are red, it is more likely that the redness is related to allergies. If the student has nasal stuffiness, runny nose, sore throat or other cold symptoms, the redness could be from sinus congestion surrounding the eyes. If the student has dark circles under the eyes, this is usually associated with chronic allergies or sinus infections or other medical issues. Sometimes redness is easily explained when a student says he or she was up late or has been crying or has a damaged contact.

Your school nurse will consider multiple things when trying to determine whether to send a student home. She may observe the student in the clinic to see if he or she is rubbing frequently. Rubbing may have caused the redness or rubbing may indicate the student has itching. She may try ice to see if this relieves the symptoms. She may look for sneezing which is associated with allergies and causes swelling of the tiny blood vessels. She may ask "what did your eyes look like when you wake up?" Or "did mom put drops in them this morning?" to help her determine her course of action.

Your school nurse will call you if she suspects something contagious. Your options at that point are to take your son or daughter to your doctor or ride it out at home. In cases where there are enough symptoms for the nurse to believe the eye infection is contagious, the student should not return to school until a doctor clears him or her (usually within 24 hours of starting treatment) or until all symptoms are gone if you chose to treat at home.

If your school nurse does not see signs of a contagious eye infection, she may call you to recommend over-the-counter remedies to relieve symptoms and make your student more comfortable. She may tell you it is your choice whether to pick your student up or she may recommend allowing the student to stay in school today. In either case, she will review good handwashing with the student. Someone who rubs the eye frequently for any reason can easily transmit bacteria to the eye and/or scratch the surface of the eye, causing further irritation.

There is no single policy that would fit every pink eye. Your school nurse will work with you, the parent, to find the right plan for your student. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your school nurse or me, the Coordinator of Health Services.

Thanks,
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<https://www.webmd.com/eye-health/eye-health-conjunctivitis#1>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pink-eye/symptoms-causes/syc-20376355>