Conjunctivitis:

Conjunctivitis, more commonly known as “pink eye,” is the inflammation or infection of the membrane lining the eyelids. Most common causes include viral infection, bacterial infection, allergic reactions, and chlorine in swimming pools. People with conjunctivitis may experience symptoms like swollen eyelids, pink discoloration to the whites of the eyes, increased sensitivity to light, and a burning or itching sensation.

There are three classes of conjunctivitis: allergic, infectious, and chemical. Allergic conjunctivitis is most often triggered in those with preexisting seasonal allergies and happens when an offending substance inflames the eye. A subset of allergic conjunctivitis is Giant Papillary Conjunctivitis, which is caused by the chronic presence of a foreign body in the eye. Infectious conjunctivitis is the second major category and can be classified as bacterial, viral, or as ophthalmia neonatorum. Bacterial conjunctivitis is an infection caused by either staphylococcal or streptococcal bacteria. Viral conjunctivitis is caused by contagious viruses associated with the common cold. Ophthalmia Neonatorum is a severe form of bacterial conjunctivitis that occurs in newborn babies and can lead to permanent eye damage if not immediately treated. It is caused by the exposure of an infant to chlamydia or gonorrhea while passing through the birth canal. Lastly, chemical conjunctivitis is caused by irritants like air pollution, chlorine in swimming pools, and exposure to other harmful chemicals.

Pink eye is highly contagious and should be treated early. While considered a minor eye infection, it may develop into a more serious problem. Conjunctivitis can be diagnosed with a comprehensive eye exam. Depending on the class of the infection, treatment includes irritant removal, saline flushes, or antibiotic eye drops and ointments. Also, applying warm compresses to the eyes may help soothe the discomfort.

Maintaining good hygiene controls the spread of pink eye. Once the infection is diagnosed, patients should refrain from touching their eyes, discard eye cosmetics, and wash their hands thoroughly and frequently. Most cases of pink eye resolve within five days.