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56,000 Pakistan schools shut over eye virus outbreak

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Millions of students will stay home from tomorrow after Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, announced blanket closures having recorded 357,000 conjunctivitis cases since the start of the year. - AFP FILE PIC

LAHORE: More than 56,000 Pakistan schools will shut for the rest of the week in a bid to curb a mass outbreak of a contagious eye virus, officials said Wednesday.

Millions of students will stay home from tomorrow after Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, announced blanket closures having recorded 357,000 conjunctivitis cases since the start of the year.

The fast-spreading eye infection causes redness, itchiness and discharge from the eyes and contamination can spread through hand contact, as well as coughing and sneezing.

"The closure has been announced as a proactive measure to give maximum protection to students against the infection," Punjab education department spokesman Zulfiqar Ali told AFP.

There are 127,000,000 residents in eastern Punjab province and 56,000 state schools, as well as thousands of independent schools also subject to the shutdown.

"We hope this will break the cycle of the infection in the province," Ali said.

Schools across Pakistan had already been due to shut on Friday owing to a public religious holiday, however many would usually open over the weekend to provide extra classes or stage exams.

Punjab authorities said students would be screened at school gates when they reopen Monday.--AFP