



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

The common cold is a contagious viral infection of the upper-respiratory tract. This includes the nose, throat, and sinuses. A cold also affects the ears and lungs. Colds are the most common disease in the world. Colds affect all ages (often infants and children) and may occur 2 to 10 times in a year in an individual.

FREQUENT SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Stuffy or runny nose. Nasal discharge may be watery at first, becoming thick and yellow.
- Throat feels scratchy or sore.
- Coughing and sneezing.
- Loss of voice.
- Mild headache. Watering eyes.
- Fatigue.
- Low-grade fever.
- Cold symptoms start slowly. Flu symptoms are more sudden and include higher fever, major aches, chills, sweats, weakness, possible severe sore throat, cough, and chest discomfort.

CAUSES

Any of at least 200 virus strains. Virus particles spread through the air or from person-to-person contact. Colds are often spread with hand-shaking.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Winter (colds are most frequent in cold weather).
- Children attending school or daycare.
- Household member who has a cold.
- Crowded or unclean living conditions.
- Stress, fatigue, and allergies.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- To prevent spreading a cold to others, avoid contact if possible during the contagious phase (first 2–4 days).
- Wash hands often, especially after blowing your nose or before handling food.
- Avoid crowded places when possible, especially during the winter.
- Eat a well-balanced, healthy diet. Include plenty of citrus fruits and other sources of vitamin C.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Recovery in 7 to 14 days.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Bacterial infections of the ears, throat, sinuses, or lungs.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- There is no cure for a cold. Self-care and time are usually all that is needed for a cold. There are many

remedies for cold symptoms. They include nonprescription cold preparations, getting extra rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and others that may be suggested by friends and family members. One or more of these may help you feel better until the body's defenses fight off the germs.

- Don't smoke. It can further irritate the nasal passages.
- For a baby too young to blow his or her nose, use an infant nasal aspirator. Don't insert cotton swabs into a child's nostrils.

MEDICATIONS

No drugs, including antibiotics, can cure the common cold. To help relieve symptoms, adults may use nonprescription drugs, such as acetaminophen, decongestants, nose drops or sprays, cough remedies, and throat lozenges. It is best to get a product that works for one symptom, such as a runny nose, rather than a multi-symptom product. If you take other drugs, talk to your health care provider or pharmacist about possible drug interactions. For colds in children, don't use any nonprescription product unless advised by a health care provider or the label states that it can be used for your child's age.

ACTIVITY

Bed rest is not needed. Do reduce activity and exercise.

DIET

- Regular diet. Drink extra fluids, including water, fruit juice, tea, and carbonated drinks.
- Hot fluids (e.g., chicken soup) may help keep nasal passages moist, soothe sore throat, and thin out mucus.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You have increased throat pain, or white or yellow spots on the tonsils or other parts of the throat.
- You have long coughing episodes. Your cough produces thick, yellow-green or gray sputum. You have a cough that lasts longer than 10 days.
- A fever lasts several days, or is over 101°F (38.3°C).
- You have chills, chest pain, or shortness of breath.
- You develop a painful earache or severe headache.
- You develop a skin rash or bruised skin.
- You feel pain in the teeth or over the sinuses.
- You develop enlarged, tender glands in the neck.
- Infant with a cold unable to bottle-feed or breast-feed.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page