

Viruses or Bacteria

What's got you sick?

Common infections in nursing homes

Antibiotics are often prescribed when they are not needed for respiratory infections. Antibiotics are only needed for treating certain infections caused by bacteria. Viral illnesses cannot be treated with antibiotics. When antibiotics aren't needed, they won't help you, and the side effects could still cause harm.

Common Respiratory Infections in Nursing Homes	Common Cause			Are Antibiotics Needed?*
	Virus	Virus or Bacteria	Bacteria	
Common cold/runny nose	✓			No
Sore throat (except strep)	✓			No
COVID-19	✓			No
Flu	✓			No
Acute bronchitis/chest cold		✓		No**
Sinus infection		✓		Maybe
Pneumonia		✓		Yes
Strep throat			✓	Yes

*Antiviral drugs are available for some viral infections, such as COVID-19 or flu.

**Antibiotics are not needed for nursing home residents with acute bronchitis or a chest cold, unless they have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or other chronic lung disease.



To learn more about antibiotic prescribing and use, visit www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use.

