

Viruses or Bacteria

What's got you sick?

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 an antibiotic is not prescribed, ask your healthcare professional for tips on how to relieve symptoms.

Common Respiratory Infections	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
Bronchitis/chest cold (in otherwise healthy children and adults)		✓		No**
Middle ear infection		✓		Maybe
Sinus infection		✓		Maybe
Strep throat			✓	Yes
Whooping cough			✓	Yes

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

**Studies show that in otherwise healthy children and adults, antibiotics for bronchitis won't help patients feel better.



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

