

# Preventing and Managing Common Cold

**Are you sneezing, or do you have a stuffy and runny nose?** You might have a cold. Antibiotics do not work against viruses that cause colds and will not help you feel better.



## What is Common Cold?

A common cold is a mild upper respiratory illness that resolves in a short period of time.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of a cold usually peak within 2 to 3 days and can include:

- ◆ Sneezing
- ◆ Nasal congestion
- ◆ Sore throat
- ◆ Cough
- ◆ Fever (although most people with colds do not have fever)

When viruses that cause colds first infect the nose and sinuses, the nose makes clear mucus. This helps wash the viruses from the nose and sinuses. After 2 or 3 days, mucus may change to a white, yellow, or green color. This is normal and does not mean you need an antibiotic.

Some symptoms, especially runny or stuffy nose and cough, can last for up to 10 to 14 days. Those symptoms should improve over time.

Colds can have similar symptoms to flu. It can be difficult (or even impossible) to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone.

## Causes

More than 200 viruses can cause a cold, but rhinoviruses are the most common type. Viruses that cause colds can spread from person to person through the air and close personal contact.

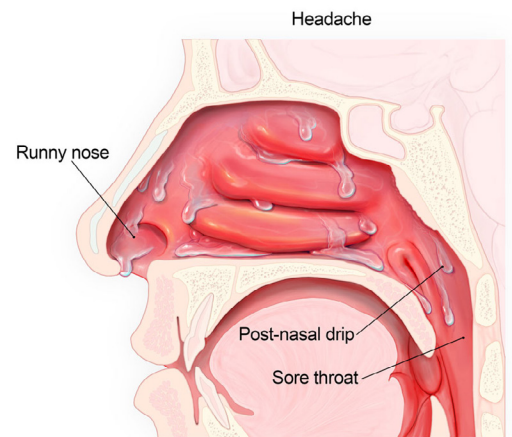
## When to Seek Medical Care

See a healthcare professional if you have:

- ◆ Trouble breathing or fast breathing
- ◆ Dehydration
- ◆ Fever that lasts longer than 4 days
- ◆ Symptoms that last more than 10 days without improvement
- ◆ Symptoms, such as fever or cough, that improve but then return or worsen
- ◆ Worsening of chronic medical conditions

This list is not all-inclusive. Please see a healthcare professional for any symptom that is severe or concerning.

### Common Cold Symptoms



When you have a cold, mucus fills your nose and could cause post-nasal drip, headache, and a sore throat.

Talk to a healthcare professional right away if your child is under 3 months old with a fever of 100.4 °F (38 °C) or higher.



## Treatment

There is no cure for a cold. It will get better on its own—without antibiotics. **Antibiotics won't help you get better if you have a cold.**

When antibiotics aren't needed, they won't help you, and their side effects could still cause harm. Side effects can range from mild reactions, like a rash, to more serious health problems. These problems can include severe allergic reactions, antimicrobial-resistant infections and *C. diff* infection. *C. diff* causes diarrhea that can lead to severe colon damage and death.

## How to Feel Better

- ◆ Get plenty of rest.
- ◆ Drink plenty of fluids.
- ◆ Use a clean humidifier or cool mist vaporizer.
- ◆ Use saline nasal spray or drops.
  - » For young children, use a rubber suction bulb to clear mucus.
- ◆ Breathe in steam from a bowl of hot water or shower.
  - » For young children, sit with the child in a bathroom filled with steam from a running shower.
- ◆ Use throat lozenges or cough drops. Do not give lozenges to children younger than 4 years of age.
- ◆ Use honey to relieve cough for adults and children at least 1 year of age or older.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist about over-the-counter medicines that can help you feel better. Always use over-the-counter medicines as directed. Remember, over-the-counter medicines may provide temporary relief of symptoms, but they will not cure your illness.

Remember, always read over-the-counter medicine product labels before giving medicines to children. **Some over-the-counter medicines are not recommended for children of certain ages.**

- ◆ Pain relievers:
  - » Children younger than 6 months: only give acetaminophen.
  - » Children 6 months or older: it is OK to give acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
  - » Never give aspirin to children because it can cause Reye's syndrome. Reye's syndrome is a very serious, but rare illness that can harm the liver and brain.
- ◆ Cough and cold medicines:
  - » Over-the-counter cough/cold medicines are not recommended for children younger than 6 years old and can result in serious and sometimes life-threatening side effects; however, young children can have fever-reducing medicines. Contact your doctor or pharmacist about the correct dose and read and follow all directions.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist about the right dosage of over-the-counter medicines for your child's age and size. Also, tell your child's doctor and pharmacist about all prescription and over-the-counter medicines they are taking.

## Prevention

CDC's Respiratory Virus Guidance provides practical recommendations and information to help people lower risk from a range of common respiratory viral illnesses. **CDC recommends that all people use core prevention strategies. These are important steps you can take to protect yourself and others:**

- ◆ Stay up to date with immunizations.
- ◆ Practice good hygiene (practices that improve cleanliness).
- ◆ Take steps for cleaner air.
- ◆ When you may have a respiratory virus:
  - » Use precautions to prevent spread.
  - » Seek health care promptly for testing and/or treatment if you have risk factors for severe illness; treatment may help lower your risk of severe illness.
- ◆ For more information, visit: [www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/guidance/respiratory-virus-guidance](http://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/guidance/respiratory-virus-guidance).

To learn more about antibiotic prescribing and use, visit [www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use](http://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use).

