

Acute Infectious Cough (Bronchitis)

What Is an Acute Infectious Cough or “Bronchitis”?

- Bronchitis is also called an acute infectious cough or a chest cold.
- Bronchitis can be caused by many viruses.
- Even though bronchitis is not caused by bacteria, bronchitis can still make people feel sick.
- Symptoms include a cough as well as a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, a scratchy or sore throat, fever, muscle pain, and feeling tired.
- Viruses that cause bronchitis spread in three ways: through the air, through contact with other people who have a virus, and on surfaces that have been touched by people with viruses.
- You can limit your chance of developing bronchitis by—
 - Washing your hands often with soap/water or hand sanitizer.
 - Avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
 - Wearing a mask when you are in crowds of people.
- You can limit the chance of spreading bronchitis by—
 - Washing your hands often with soap/water or hand sanitizer.
 - Coughing into a tissue or your elbow.
 - Wearing a mask when you are sick and around other people.
 - Staying home from work, school, or daycare, if feasible.



What Should I Do To Feel Better?

- You can't make the virus causing cough or bronchitis go away faster, but you can treat the symptoms. Some suggestions include—
 - Taking ibuprofen (commonly called Motrin® or Advil®) or acetaminophen (commonly called Tylenol®) for pain relief, unless your clinician suggests not taking them. Store brands are just as good as name brands. Follow the instructions on the package.
 - To help a sore throat, gargle with water, take cough drops (wait until a child is at least 6 years old), swallow honey (do not give honey to children under 1 year of age), or drink warm tea.
 - Get plenty of rest, drink lots of water, and do not smoke.
 - Ask your clinician about whether other medications might help you.

What Is the Role of Antibiotics?

- Antibiotics can kill bacteria but not viruses.
- Antibiotics can have side effects like rashes, diarrhea, or yeast infections.
- Taking antibiotics will not help you feel better faster and might actually make you feel worse.

When Will I Feel Better?

- Bronchitis can last for up to 3 weeks, but people usually start feeling a little better around 10–14 days.

When Should I Get More Medical Care?

- You do not feel better after 3 weeks.
- You have a fever of over 102 degrees Fahrenheit or develop a rash.
- Go to the emergency department if you develop trouble breathing, trouble swallowing, shortness of breath, confusion, a bad headache, severe fatigue, or severe weakness, or other symptoms that concern you.

Directions for Adding Your Logo to Your Document

If you choose to add a logo to this document, you can place it in the header or footer. Below are instructions for adding a logo using Adobe Acrobat Pro. You may also use a comparable PDF editing software.

Steps:

1. Open the PDF in your Adobe PDF editing program.
2. Click on the Tools menu at the top.
3. Select “Edit PDF” from the screen.
4. Select the “Add Image” button from the top.
5. Navigate on your computer to where your logo is saved. Click Open.
6. Click on the PDF where you want the logo to appear. If needed, move the logo by clicking and dragging it to the correct location.
7. Resize the logo to fit with your document.
8. Click the save icon (at the top), or go to File menu and select Save. Make sure to save with a new name.

AHRQ Pub. No. 26(27)-0021
October 2026