

The Common Cold



What Is the “Common Cold”?

- Colds can be caused by a large number of viruses.
- Even though colds are not caused by bacteria, they can still cause people to feel pretty miserable.
- Some symptoms from colds include watery eyes, a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, a scratchy or sore throat, fever, muscle pain, cough, and feeling very tired.
- Cold viruses spread in three ways: through the air, through contact with other people who have a cold, and on surfaces that have been touched by people with colds.
- You can limit your chance of developing a cold by—
 - Washing your hands often
 - Avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- You can limit the chance of spreading a cold by—
 - Washing your hands often with soap/water or hand sanitizer
 - Coughing or sneezing into a tissue or your elbow
 - Wearing a mask when you are sick and around other people
 - Staying home from work, school, or daycare when symptomatic, if feasible

What Should I Do To Feel Better?

- You can't make colds go away faster, but you can treat the symptoms. Some suggestions include:
 - Taking ibuprofen (commonly called Motrin®) or acetaminophen (commonly called Tylenol®) for pain relief according to their instructions, unless your clinician suggests not taking them. Store brands (e.g., CVS brand) are just as good as brand names (e.g., Motrin).
 - To help a sore throat, gargle with water, take cough drops (generally wait until a child is at least 6 years old), take ½ teaspoon to 1 teaspoon of honey every 2 hours or so (do not give honey to children under 1 year of age), and/or drink warm tea.
 - Get plenty of rest, drink lots of water, and avoid smoking.
 - Zinc, vitamin C, and echinacea have not been shown to help, but some patients may want to take these.

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?

- Most colds last 1 to 2 weeks, but sometimes a cough can last for several weeks.
- Although you may not feel well, the common cold usually does not cause serious illness.

Contact Your Clinician Immediately if—

- You do not feel better after 10 days.
- You develop a high fever (above 102 degrees Fahrenheit), trouble breathing, trouble swallowing, have shortness of breath, confusion, a bad headache, continued pain in your face, severe weakness, a new rash, or any other symptoms that are concerning to you.

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