

COMMON COLD FACT SHEET

What is the common cold?

The common cold is an infection that can be caused by many viruses, but rhinoviruses are most common. Most people get colds in the winter and spring, but it is possible to get a cold any time of the year.

Who can get the common cold?

Anyone. Adults have an average of two to three colds per year, and children have even more.

What are the symptoms of the common cold?

Symptoms of a cold usually include sore throat, runny nose, coughing, sneezing, watery eyes, headaches and body aches.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually begin in about two days for colds caused by rhinovirus, the most common virus that causes colds.

How is the common cold spread?

The common cold can spread through droplets in the air that are produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can also spread when an infected person has close personal contact with an uninfected person. You can also get infected through contact with stool (poop) from an infected person. You can be exposed to droplets or stool when you shake hands with someone who has a cold, or touch an object or surface, such as a doorknob, that has viruses on it and then touch your eyes, mouth or nose.

Is there a vaccine for the common cold?

No.

How is the common cold treated?

There is no cure for the common cold. It is important to drink plenty of fluids and get lots of rest in order to get better. Non-prescription (over-the-counter) medicines may help reduce symptoms but will not make your cold go away any faster. Most people recover in approximately seven to 10 days. However, people with weakened immune systems, asthma or conditions that affect the lungs and breathing passages may develop serious illness, such as pneumonia.

How can people protect themselves against the common cold?

You can take the following steps to protect against a cold:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, scrubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces, and objects such as toys and doorknobs
- Avoid personal contact, such as kissing or sharing cups or eating utensils, with people who are sick

Where can I get more information?

Information about the common cold and other related health topics can be found at www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit www.doh.dc.gov or call (202) 442-9371.