

Common Cold

What is the common cold?

The common cold leads to more healthcare provider visits and absences from school and work than any other illness each year. It is caused by any one of several viruses and is easily spread to others. It's not caused by cold weather or getting wet.

What causes the common cold?

A cold is caused by any one of several viruses that causes inflammation of the membranes that line the nose and throat. It can result from any one of more than 200 different viruses. But, the rhinoviruses causes most colds.

The common cold is very easily spread to others. It's often spread through airborne droplets that are coughed or sneezed into the air by the sick person. The droplets are then inhaled by another person. Colds can also be spread when a sick person touches you or a surface (like a doorknob) that you then touch.

Contrary to popular belief, cold weather or being chilled doesn't cause a cold. However, more colds do occur during the cold season (early fall to late winter). This is probably due to a variety of factors, including:

- Schools are in session, increasing the risk for exposure to the virus
- People stay more indoors and are in closer proximity to each other
- Low humidity, causing dry nasal passages which are more susceptible to cold viruses

Who is at risk for the common cold?

Everyone is at risk for the common cold. People are most likely to have colds during fall and winter, starting in late August or early September until March or April. The increased incidence of colds during the cold season may be attributed to the fact that more people are indoors and close to each other. In addition, in cold, dry weather, the nasal passages become drier and more vulnerable to infection.

Children suffer more colds each year than adults, due to their immature immune systems and to the close physical contact with other children at school or day care. In fact, the average child will have between 6 to 10 colds a year. The average adult will get 2 to 4 colds a year.

What are the symptoms of the common cold?

Common cold symptoms may include:

- Stuffy, runny nose
- Scratchy, tickly throat
- Sneezing
- Watering eyes
- Low-grade fever
- Sore throat
- Mild hacking cough
- Achy muscles and bones
- Headache
- Mild fatigue
- Chills
- Watery discharge from nose that thickens and turns yellow or green

Colds usually start 2 to 3 days after the virus enters the body and symptoms last from several days to several weeks.

Cold symptoms may look like other medical conditions. Always consult your healthcare provider for a diagnosis if your symptoms are severe.

A cold and the flu (influenza) are two different illnesses. A cold is relatively harmless and usually clears up by itself, although sometimes it may lead to a secondary infection, such as an ear infection. However, the flu can lead to complications, such as pneumonia and even death. What may seem like a cold, could be the flu. Be aware of these differences:

Cold symptoms

Flu symptoms

Low or no fever

High fever

Sometimes a headache

A headache very common

Stuffy, runny nose

Clear nose

Sneezing

Sometimes sneezing

Mild, hacking cough

Cough, often becoming severe

Slight aches and pains

Often severe aches and pains

Mild fatigue

Several weeks of fatigue

Sore throat

Sometimes a sore throat

Normal energy level or may feel sluggish

Extreme exhaustion

How is the common cold diagnosed?

Most common colds are diagnosed based on reported symptoms. However, cold symptoms may be similar to certain bacterial infections, allergies, and other medical conditions. Always consult your healthcare provider for a diagnosis if your symptoms are severe.

How is the common cold treated?

Currently, there is no medicine available to cure or shorten the duration of the common cold. However, the following are some treatments that may help to relieve some symptoms of the cold:

- Over-the-counter cold medicines, such as decongestants and cough medicine
- Over-the-counter antihistamines (medicine that helps dry up nasal secretions and suppress coughing)
- Rest
- Increased fluid intake
- Pain relievers for headache or fever
- Warm, salt water gargling for sore throat
- Petroleum jelly for raw, chapped skin around the nose and lips
- Warm steam for congestion

Because colds are caused by viruses, antibiotics don't work. Antibiotics are only effective when given to treat bacterial infections.

Do not give aspirin to a child who has fever. Aspirin, when given as treatment for viral illnesses in children, has been associated with Reye syndrome. This is a potentially serious or deadly disorder in children.

What are the complications of the common cold?

Colds can lead to secondary infections, including bacterial, middle ear, and sinus infections that may require treatment with antibiotics. If you have a cold along with high fever, sinus pain, significantly swollen glands, or a mucus-producing cough, see your healthcare provider. You may need additional treatment.

Can the common cold be prevented?

The best way to avoid catching cold is to wash your hands often and avoid close contact with people who have colds. When around people with colds, do not touch your nose or eyes, because your hands may be contaminated with the virus.

If you have a cold, cough and sneeze in facial tissue and dispose of the tissue promptly. Then wash your hands right away. Also clean surfaces with disinfectants that kill viruses can halt the spread of the common cold. Research has shown that rhinoviruses may survive up to 3 hours outside of the nasal lining.

When should I call my healthcare provider?

If your symptoms get worse or you have new symptoms, let your healthcare provider know. If your symptoms don't improve within a few days, call your provider, as you could have another type of infection.

Key points about the common cold

- A cold is caused by a virus that causes inflammation of the membranes that line the nose and throat.
- The common cold is very easily spread to others. It's often spread through airborne droplets that are coughed or sneezed into the air by the sick person.
- The droplets are then inhaled by another person.
- Symptoms may include a stuffy, runny nose, scratchy, tickly throat, sneezing, watery eyes and a low-grade fever.
- Treatment to reduce symptoms includes getting rest and drinking plenty of fluids.
- Because colds are caused by viruses, treatment with antibiotics won't work.
- The best prevention for the common cold is frequent hand washing and avoiding close contact with people who have colds.

The Do's and Don'ts of Easing Cold Symptoms

At the first sign of cold symptoms, you may look to stock up on any number of remedies. But what actually works? While there is no cure for the common cold, there are some proven ways to treat your symptoms. Here's a guide to what works and what to avoid.

Stay hydrated. Whether its tea, warm water with lemon or broth, drinking warm liquids can be soothing, prevent dehydration and ease congestion.

Avoid salty foods, alcohol, coffee and sugary drinks, which can be dehydrating. Ice chips are another simple way to stay hydrated and calm a scratchy throat.

Gargle with salt water. A saltwater gargle with about 1 teaspoon of salt per cup of warm water can help reduce the pain and swelling of a sore throat.

Over-the-counter medications : Over-the-counter decongestants, antihistamines and pain relievers, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen, can reduce some cold symptoms. Children younger than 6 should not use over-the-counter medications. Talk to your doctor for more details.

Humidify the air . Cold air holds less moisture than warm air. Dry nostrils are more prone to viruses, and if you're already sick, dry air can worsen a sore throat. Try using a humidifier. If you don't have one, leave a shallow bowl of water out, particularly near a heat source. As the water evaporates, it'll slowly humidify the room.

Rest : This is the time to recharge your body's immune system. Rest and sleep are the best ways to do that. Make sure you're sleeping between eight to 10 hours at night. This is also a great chance to take a break from strenuous exercise for two to three days.

What to Avoid

Zinc. There's little evidence to support zinc's cold-fighting reputation.

Antibiotics. Antibiotics are designed to treat bacterial infections, not viruses.

Vitamin C . At the first sign of cold symptoms, many people turn to vitamin C. However, there's little evidence that it has an effect on the cold virus. While some studies suggest regular intake of vitamin C can help reduce the duration of cold symptoms, it has no effect if taken after you have cold symptoms.

Smoking . Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke can further irritate your nose, throat and lungs.

Call Your Doctor If:

Your symptoms last longer than two weeks.

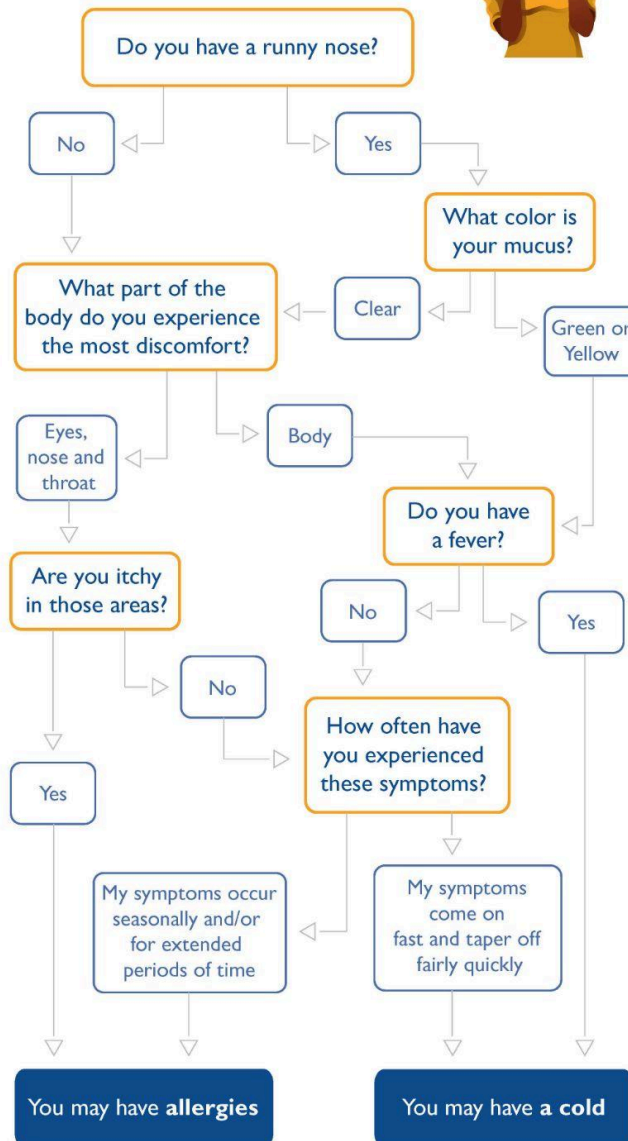
Your symptoms worsen or you develop new symptoms, as you could have another type of infection.

You have a sore throat or fever higher than 100 degrees for longer than three days.

You're experiencing intense chest pain and shortness of breath.

Allergies or a Cold?

ALLERGIES OR A COLD?



CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF

- Your symptoms last longer than two weeks.
- Your symptoms worsen or you develop new symptoms, as you could have another type of infection.
- You have a sore throat or fever higher than 100 degrees for longer than three days.
- You're experiencing intense chest pain and shortness of breath.

SOURCES
Johns Hopkins otolaryngologist Sandra Lin, M.D.
Johns Hopkins Medicine Health Library

REFERENCIA: JOHNS HOPKINS MEDICINE. <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/>