

Common Cold

A cold is an upper respiratory tract infection caused by a viral infection. The **symptoms** of the common cold will usually resolve within a week, although some people continue to have symptoms for up to two weeks. The common cold usually causes:

- + A runny nose.
- + Nasal congestion.
- + Sneezing.
- + Watery eyes.
- + Sore throat.
- + Coughing.

A slight fever may also develop.

Antibiotics are not useful for the treatment of the viral infections. Unnecessary use of antibiotics can lead to adverse events such as allergic reactions, diarrhea, and antibiotic resistance.

Treatments for the cold are aimed at the relief of symptoms, but they do not shorten or cure the cold. Colds are often transmitted via touching hands, touching a surface, sneezing, or coughing.

PREVENTION

- + Avoid close contact with people who have a cold.
- + Keep your hands away from your nose, mouth and eyes.
- + Wash your hands often.
- + When soap and water are not available, use alcohol based hand gels.
- + Get plenty of rest.
- + **DO NOT** smoke.
- + **DO NOT** share food and drinks.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOURSELF AT HOME

- + Wash your hands often, especially after you blow your nose. Sneeze and cough into your elbow, or into a tissue.
- + The symptoms of a cold will resolve over time, even without any treatment. You may take over-the-counter decongestants or cold remedies. Follow the drug label instructions or speak to the pharmacist about which medication is suitable for you.
 - + People with underlying medical conditions or those who are on multiple medications should speak with their doctor or pharmacist before taking any additional medications to ensure that they are safe to use.
- + You may take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) for fever, aches and sweats.
- + Use a cool-mist humidifier (vaporizer) to increase air moisture. This will make it easier for you to breathe. **DO NOT** use hot steam.
- + Take rest and get plenty of sleep.
- + Drink plenty of clear fluids (8 glasses a day) such as water, fruit juice, tea, clear soups, and carbonated beverages.

WHEN TO GET HELP

Go to the nearest Emergency Department

if you are experiencing any of the following:

- + Are coughing up thick gray or bloody sputum.
- + Have pain in your chest.
- + Have persistent high fever not responsive to acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil).
- + Have unusual shortness of breath.
- + Have a severe headache and neck pain or stiffness.

See your family doctor if:

- + You have a cold that lasts longer than two to three weeks.

TO LEARN MORE ASK

- + Your family doctor.
- + HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or go online to www.HealthLinkBC.ca

RECOMMENDED FOLLOW UP

- Follow up with your primary care provider in ___ days.

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Find this information sheet on the BC Emergency Medicine Network website:

www.bcemn.ca/clinical_resource/common-cold/