



## Cold and Influenza

### What is the common cold and the influenza?

The common cold and influenza (the “flu”) are viral infections of the respiratory tract. The respiratory tract includes the throat, nose, airways and lungs. These viruses typically last about 7-10 days.

### What viruses causes colds and influenza?

More than 200 different viruses can cause colds. Not as many viruses cause influenza. That is why there is a shot available to prevent influenza, but not for colds.

### What are the symptoms and how can I tell that I have a cold or influenza?

Although the common cold and influenza share many similar symptoms, they are 2 different conditions. Symptoms of a cold develop slowly and are often milder than influenza symptoms.

### How are these viruses spread?

They are spread most often by touch rather than through the air. So, if you have a cold or influenza you should wash your hands often to prevent spreading it.

#### Cold symptoms include:

- Fever over 102°
- Runny or stuffy nose (often with green or yellow discharge)
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Sneezing
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches
- Headache
- Watery eyes

#### Influenza symptoms usually appear suddenly and can include:

- Fever over 102°
- Stuffy nose
- Nausea
- Chills and sweats
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches (especially in back, arms and legs)
- Cough
- Headache
- Loss of appetite

### What can I do to feel better?

There is no cure for a cold or influenza. **Viruses are not affected by antibiotics so they are not helpful.** All you can do to feel better is treat your symptoms while your body fights off the virus.



*Ways to treat your cold and influenza symptoms:*

- Get plenty of rest, especially while you have a fever. Rest helps your body fight the infection.
- Drink lots of fluids such as water and clear soups. Fluids help loosen mucus. Fluids are also important because they help prevent dehydration.
- Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke which can make cold symptoms worse.
- Avoid drinking alcohol until feeling better.

*For fever, headache, body aches, and chills*, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve) are proven to relieve pain better than acetaminophen (Tylenol). These are NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs). Do not take NSAIDs if you have kidney problems or stomach ulcers. Follow label directions.

*Sore throat* can be treated with warm salt water gargles (1/2 teaspoon in one cup of warm water) every two hours. Benzocaine lozenges and throat sprays such as Cepacol and Chloraseptic offer some relief.

*Runny nose and nasal congestion* can be treated with saline (salt water) nose sprays to help loosen mucus and moisten the tender skin in your nose. Antihistamines dry up your nose. Antihistamines that are less sedating include medications such as Claritin, Zyrtec, Allegra or Xyzal. Decongestants open up nasal passages. These include pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) or phenylephrine (Sudafed PE). Decongestants with or without antihistamines have proven benefit. Also combination products are available that have both an antihistamine and pseudoephedrine. These include Claritin-D, Zyrtec-D or Allegra-D. Also available is Mucinex-D which is a combination of guaifenesin (which thins secretions) and pseudoephedrine.

*Cough* can usually be managed with over-the-counter medications containing guaifenesin and dextromethorphan (DM). These include Robitussin, Robitussin DM, Delsym, Mucinex or Mucinex DM. Honey can also be used as a natural cough remedy. Use one tablespoon in 1/2 - 3/4 cup warm water. If you have a severe cough that keeps you awake at night, you may need a prescription cough medication prescribed by a healthcare provider.

**What about combination cold and flu medications?**

Combination medications that treat multiple symptoms are available, but are often not the best choice depending on your symptoms. With a "shotgun approach" to treating symptoms, you often take a medication included that you don't need, or you don't realize that one is not included that could help your symptoms. **READ PRODUCT LABELS.** Many of these do not contain an antihistamine. "Extra Strength" often mean it also contains acetaminophen for pain relief.

**When should I call my doctor?**

- If you seem to be getting worse even though you are using the above medications



- If you have a high fever (above 102°F)
- If you have ear/facial/chest pain
- If your symptoms last longer than 2 weeks
- If you develop trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- Confusion or disorientation
- Fainting or feeling like you are going to faint
- Very swollen glands in the neck or jaw

**Can I prevent catching a cold or the flu?**

You can reduce your risk by washing your hands frequently to stop the spread of germs. Eating healthy, exercising regularly, and getting enough sleep are important in preventing colds and influenza because these help boost your immune system. Cleaning common surfaces with disinfectants can also help stop the spread of germs. Getting a flu shot in the fall is the best way to avoid getting influenza.

*Information provided by familydoctor.org.*