



Common Cold and Runny Nose

Español: [El resfriado común y la secreción nasal o moqueo \(/getsmart/antibiotic-use/URI/colds-sp.html\)](/getsmart/antibiotic-use/URI/colds-sp.html)

Overview of Common Cold

A cold usually includes a runny nose, sore throat, sneezing, and coughing. These symptoms can last for up to two weeks.

Causes

Common Cold

- Over 200 viruses can cause the common cold
- The rhinovirus is the most common type of virus that causes colds

Runny Nose during a Cold

When germs that cause colds first infect the nose and sinuses, the nose makes clear mucus. This helps wash the germs from the nose and sinuses. After two or three days, the body's immune cells fight back, changing the mucus to a white or yellow color. As the bacteria that live in the nose grow back, they may also be found in the mucus, which changes the mucus to a greenish color. This is normal and does not mean you or your child needs antibiotics.

Signs and Symptoms of the Common Cold

- Sneezing
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Sore throat
- Coughing
- Watery eyes
- Mild headache
- Mild body aches

See a Healthcare Provider if You or Your Child has:

- Temperature higher than 100.4° F
- Symptoms that last more than 10 days
- Symptoms that are not relieved by over-the-counter medicines

Your healthcare provider can determine if you or your child has a cold and can recommend symptomatic therapy. If your child is younger than three months of age and has a fever, it's important to always call your healthcare provider right away.

Antibiotics are Needed When...

Antibiotics are needed only if your healthcare provider tells you that you or your child has a bacterial infection. Your healthcare provider may prescribe other medicine or give tips to help with a cold's symptoms, but antibiotics are not needed to treat a cold or runny nose.

Antibiotics Will Not Help if...

Since the common cold is caused by a virus, antibiotics will not help it get better. A runny nose or cold almost always gets better on its own, so it is better to wait and take antibiotics only when they are needed. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed can be harmful, and may lead to unwanted side effects like diarrhea, rashes, nausea, and stomach pain. More severe side effects may rarely occur, including life-threatening allergic reactions, kidney toxicity, and severe skin reactions.

Each time you or your child takes an antibiotic, the bacteria that normally live in your body (on the skin, in the intestine, in the mouth and nose, etc.) are more likely to become resistant to antibiotics. Common antibiotics cannot kill infections caused by these resistant germs. [Learn more about antibiotic resistance \(../antibiotic-resistance-faqs.html\)](#).

How to Feel Better

Rest, over-the-counter medicines and other self-care methods may help you or your child feel better. For more information about symptomatic relief, visit the [Symptom Relief \(../symptom-relief.html\)](#) section of this website or talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist.

Remember, always use over-the-counter products as directed. Many over-the-counter products are not recommended for children younger than certain ages.

Preventing the Common Cold

- Practice good hand hygiene
- Avoid close contact with people who have colds or other upper respiratory infections

Related Pages

- [Runny Nose Q&A \(../campaign-materials/print-materials/FactSheet-RunnyNose.html\)](#)
- [Hand Hygiene \(http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/\)](http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/)
- [Ounce of Prevention-Kids \(http://www.oopkids.com/clean_hands.html\)](http://www.oopkids.com/clean_hands.html)
[☒ \(http://www.cdc.gov/Other/disclaimer.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/Other/disclaimer.html)
- [Healthy Homes \(http://www.cdc.gov/healthyhomes/\)](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyhomes/)

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