

Cold and Flu

Common colds and the 'flu' (influenza) are viral infections affecting the nose, sinuses, throat and airways. Antibiotics do not work against these viral infections, but colds and the flu usually get better on their own. Medicines may relieve some of the uncomfortable symptoms of colds and flu.

When someone has a cold or flu, the fluid from their nose, mouth and airways contains the infecting virus. Colds and flu spread when this infected fluid passes to someone-else (e.g., by touch, coughing, sneezing). Colds spread easily, especially between children who spend a lot of time together (e.g., at childcare or school). A cold is most infectious in the first one or two days after symptoms develop.

Signs and symptoms

Cold symptoms include:

- Runny nose
- Blocked nose (congestion)
- Sore throat
- Red, watery eyes
- Sneezing

- Coughing
- Mild fever
- Headache
- Tiredness.

Flu (influenza) symptoms are similar to cold symptoms, but are usually more severe and may also include:

- High fevers, sweating and shivering
- Aching muscles and joints
- Weakness and lethargy
- Loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting.

Cold and flu symptoms usually go within 10 days, although a cough may last longer.

Protection against influenza

A 'flu injection' will give protection against the 'flu'. Vaccination, before the 'flu' season starts each year, is

recommended for all adults over 65 years, and others at a higher risk of getting influenza. Prescription medicines to treat influenza are also available. Ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice.

Self care

- Get plenty of sleep and rest and stay comfortably warm. A child with the flu should rest and keep warm until their temperature has been normal for 48 hours.
- Drink plenty of fluids to help thin mucus and prevent dehydration. Offer babies water between feeds. Adults and children should drink enough water every day to satisfy thirst and keep their urine light-coloured (unless a doctor advises not to).
- Breathe in steam (e.g., from inhalations, vaporizers, showers, baths) to loosen mucus. Avoid inhalations for young children, as steam can burn.
- Blow nose gently, with one or both nostrils open. Mucus can be removed from a baby's nostrils with a bulb syringe – ask a pharmacist.
- Cover nose blowing with a tissue and dispose of used tissues carefully. Cover nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing, preferably with a tissue or the bend of your elbow, not your hand.
- Wash hands regularly with soap and water, especially before cooking or eating and after blowing nose, coughing or sneezing. If soap and

water are not available, use an alcohol based hand sanitiser.

- Wash children's dummies and toys regularly.
- Keep hands away from eyes, nose and mouth.
- Avoid sharing eating and drinking utensils.
- Eat regular, healthy meals, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and grain foods. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Avoid cigarette smoke – it can make symptoms worse.
- Limit alcohol.

Medicines

A variety of non-prescription medicines can help relieve cold and flu symptoms. Some cold and flu medicines should not be used by young children, pregnant or breastfeeding women or people with certain medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, glaucoma, high blood pressure). Some can interfere with other medicines. Always ask a pharmacist for advice.

Medicines that can help relieve cold and flu symptoms include:

Decongestants

- May clear a blocked nose. They are available as syrups, tablets, nasal sprays and drops.
- Nasal sprays and drops should not be used for more than five days in a row.
- Check with a doctor or pharmacist before giving to children.

Antihistamines

- May help relieve a runny nose, sneezing and a dry cough.
- Should not be used for a 'chesty' cough that brings up mucus (phlegm or sputum).
- Check with a doctor or pharmacist before giving to children.

Cough suppressants

- May relieve a dry cough.
- Should not be used for a 'chesty' cough that brings up mucus.
- Check with a doctor or pharmacist before giving to children.

Expectorants and Mucolytics

- May loosen and thin mucus in the nose, sinuses and airways.
- Check with a doctor or pharmacist before giving to children.

Relief of pain and fever

Simple pain relievers (e.g., paracetamol, ibuprofen) can relieve headache, sore throat, aches, fever and shivering.

Note: Aspirin should not be given to children under 16 years of age, unless advised by a doctor.

Other treatments

- Saline (salt water) nose sprays and drops may help loosen and remove mucus in the nose and sinuses.
- Medicated inhalations (e.g., menthol, eucalyptus) may help clear a blocked nose. Check with a doctor or pharmacist before giving to children.

Important

A more serious viral or bacterial infection or other medical condition may develop from a cold or the flu (e.g., an ear infection, sinusitis, asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia). Bacterial infections usually need antibiotic treatment.

Consult a doctor if symptoms persist for more than 10 days or if any of the following symptoms develop:

- High temperature (over 38.50 C) or chills
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck
- Light hurts eyes
- Skin rash, pale or mottled skin
- Unusual drowsiness or confusion
- Ear ache
- Shortness of breath, noisy or fast breathing or difficulty breathing
- Cough lasting longer than 4 weeks
- Yellow, brown, green or blood stained mucus (phlegm)
- Chest pain
- Muscle aches
- Eyes sticky with pus
- A child refuses feeds or fluids, is excessively irritable, has a strange high pitched cry or has a bulging fontanelle.

- Sucking on lozenges may relieve sore throats and coughing. Avoid in young children.
- Gargles (anti-inflammatory, anaesthetic or antiseptic) can relieve sore throats. Avoid in young children.

Note: There is no conclusive scientific evidence that herbal or vitamin products help prevent or treat colds and flu.

For more information

'Common colds'

Website: www.nps.org.au

InFLUenza

Website: www.fightflu.gov.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.*

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