

# Common Cold and Runny Nose

Antibiotics cannot cure the common cold. The common cold is one of the most frequent reasons children miss school and adults miss work. Every year, adults have an average of 2-3 colds, and children have even more.

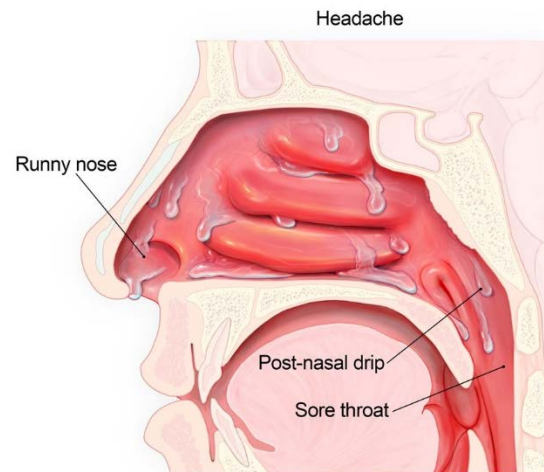
## What are the causes of the common cold?

More than 200 viruses can cause the common cold, and infections can spread from person to person through the air and close personal contact. Antibiotics do not work against these viruses and do not help you feel better if you have a cold. Rhinovirus is the most common type of virus that causes colds.

## What are some risk factors for the common cold?

There are many things that can increase your risk for the common cold, including:

- Exposure to someone with the common cold
- Age (infants and young children are at higher risk for colds)
- A weakened immune system or taking drugs that weaken the immune system
- Season (colds are more common during the fall and winter)



When you have a cold, mucus fills your nose, causing runny nose, congestion, and mucus to drip down your throat (post-nasal drip), which can cause a sore throat and cough.

## **What are the signs and symptoms of the common cold?**

When germs that cause colds first infect the nose and sinuses (air-filled pockets in the face), the nose makes clear mucus. This helps wash the germs from the nose and sinuses. After two or three days, mucus may change to a white, yellow, or green color. This is normal and does not mean you or your child needs antibiotics. Other signs and symptoms of the common cold can include:

- Sneezing
- Stuffy nose
- Sore throat
- Coughing
- Post-nasal drip (mucus dripping down your throat)
- Watery eyes
- Mild headache
- Mild body aches

These symptoms usually peak within 2-3 days but can last for up to 10-14 days.

## **When should I seek medical care?**

See a clinician if you or your child has any of the following symptoms:

- Symptoms that last more than 10 days without improvement
- Symptoms that are severe or unusual

If your child is younger than three months of age and has a fever, it's important to call your clinician right away.

## **How is the common cold diagnosed and treated?**

Antibiotics are not needed to treat a cold or runny nose, which almost always gets better on its own. Your clinician will determine what type of illness you or your child has by asking about symptoms and doing a physical examination. Sometimes they will also swab the inside of your nose or mouth.

Since the common cold is caused by viruses, antibiotics will not help it get better and may even cause harm in both children and adults. Your clinician can give you tips to help with symptoms like fever and coughing.

### **How can I relieve my symptoms?**

Rest, over-the-counter medicines and other self-care methods may help you or your child feel better. For more information about symptom relief, talk to your clinician, including your pharmacist. Remember, always use over-the-counter products as directed. Many over-the-counter products are not recommended for children of certain ages.

### **How can I prevent the common cold?**

There are steps you can take to help prevent getting a cold, including:

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

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Adapted from CDC. *Common Cold and Runny Nose* Access at:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use/community/for-patients/common-illnesses/colds.html>

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