



# Colds

A cold is an infection of the nose, sinuses, and/or throat. There are more than 200 types of viruses that can cause a cold. A virus is a type of germ that causes infections. In the U.S., most colds occur in the Fall and Winter.

## How is it spread?

Most people get a cold from a person who has a cold. A cold virus spreads easily. For example: when a person with a cold sneezes, coughs, talks, or laughs, the virus can spread into the air as droplets. These droplets can spread to people as they breathe and to surfaces up to 6 feet away. Cold viruses can spread to your hands if you touch anything that has the virus on it. If you then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth, you can get the cold virus.

## What are signs of a cold?

- ▶ Stuffy or runny nose.
- ▶ Sneezing.
- ▶ Sore throat.
- ▶ Coughing.
- ▶ Headache (mild).
- ▶ Muscle aches and pains (mild).
- ▶ Chest discomfort (sometimes).
- ▶ Tiredness (sometimes).
- ▶ Fever (rare).

## Flu vs. Cold: Know the Difference

Symptoms	Flu	Cold
Fever	Usual – 100°F or higher	Rare
Chills	Common	Uncommon
Body or muscle aches	Common – can be severe	Uncommon or mild
Headache	Common – can be severe	Uncommon
Feeling tired and weak	Common – can be severe	Sometimes – usually mild: you don't feel tired
Cough	Common – can last 2-3 weeks	Common – mild to moderate hacking
Sneezing	Sometimes	Common
Runny or stuffy nose	Sometimes	Common
Sore throat	Sometimes	Common
Chest discomfort	Common – can be severe	Sometimes – can be mild to moderate

### How can you feel better if you have a cold?

- ▶ Get plenty of rest.
- ▶ Consider the use of over-the-counter drugs. **Note:** not all over-the-counter drugs are safe for children. Find more on drugs safe to give children at: [www.cdc.gov/getsmart/antibiotic-use/symptom-relief.html#d](http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/antibiotic-use/symptom-relief.html#d).
- ▶ Use a clean humidifier to help relieve congestion.
- ▶ Soothe a sore throat with ice chips, throat spray, or lozenges (do not give lozenges to young children).
- ▶ Gargle with warm salt water.
- ▶ Do not smoke.
- ▶ Avoid second-hand smoke.

### If you have a cold?

- ▶ Clean hands often with soap and water or alcohol hand cleaner.
- ▶ Cough or sneeze into a tissue or into your sleeve.
- ▶ Don't share eating or drinking utensils, hand towels or toothpaste.
- ▶ Stay at home if possible.
- ▶ Drink plenty of non-caffeinated fluids, such as water, teas, broths, and sports drinks.
- ▶ See your health care provider if your:
  - Temperature goes over 100.4°F.
  - Symptoms last over 10 days.



For more information on cleaning hands see *Clean Hands* on page 99.

### How can you avoid a cold?

- ▶ Limit or avoid people who are at risk.
- ▶ Clean hands often.
- ▶ Eat the right foods and get enough sleep to stay healthy.

### Learn more:

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):**

**Common Cold and Runny Nose**

[www.cdc.gov/getsmart/antibiotic-use/URI/colds.html](http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/antibiotic-use/URI/colds.html)

**Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work – Symptom Relief**

[www.cdc.gov/getsmart/antibiotic-use/symptom-relief.html](http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/antibiotic-use/symptom-relief.html)